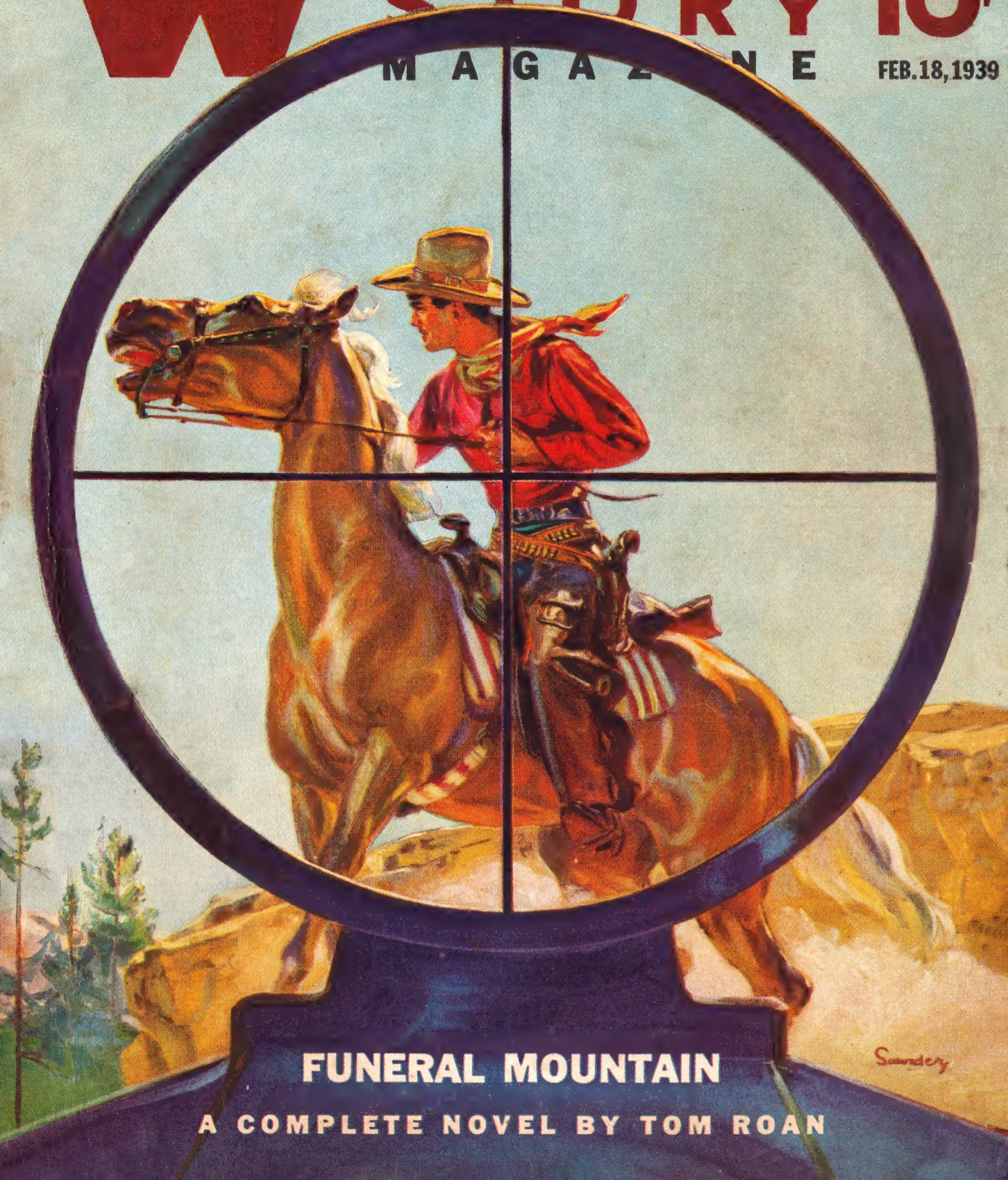
STREET AND SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

10¢

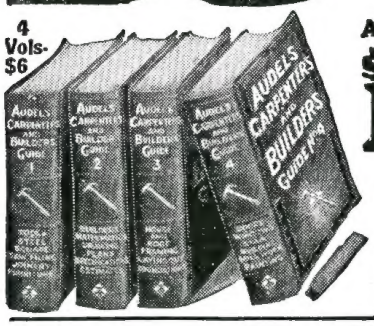
FEB. 18, 1939



FUNERAL MOUNTAIN

A COMPLETE NOVEL BY TOM ROAN

BUILDERS TRADE GUIDES



AUDELS CARPENTERS AND BUILDERS GUIDES—4 VOLS. $6

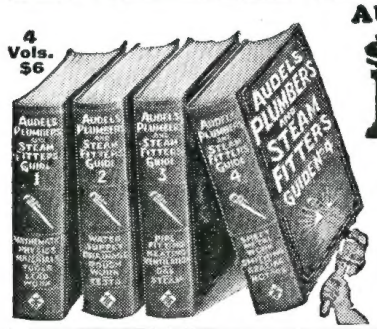
$1 PER MO.

Inside Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics—all Woodworkers. **1600 pages; 3700 diagrams; flexible; pocket size.** Short-cut instructions, new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems—money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. A Helping Hand to Easier and Better Work and Better Pay. To get this aid for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

How to use steel square; How to file and set saws; How to build furniture; How to use mitre box; How to use chalk line; How to use rules; How to make joints; Carpenters' arithmetic; Mensuration problems; Estimating strength of timbers; How to set girders and sills: How to frame houses and roofs: How to estimate costs; How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc.; How to read and draw plans; Drawing up specifications; How to excavate; How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square; How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights; How to build stairs; How to put on interior trim; How to hang doors; How to lath—lay floors; How to paint.

"Audels Guides worth four times their price—handy too as I carry them in pocket for reference." **W. J. Bates, Knoxville, Pa.**



AUDELS PLUMBERS AND STEAMFITTERS GUIDES—4 VOLS. $6

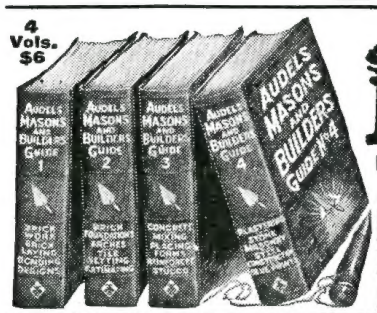
$1 PER MO.

A new edition—just out! A practical, illustrated, Reference Library and Study-Course for Master Plumbers, Journeymen and Apprentice Steamfitters, Gas Fitters and Helpers, Sheet Metal Workers, Draughtsmen, Master Builders, Engineers and all Building Trade Students. **1670 pages; 3642 diagrams; flexible; pocket size.** Guides explain all the principles, advances and short cuts of the Plumbing and Heating trade. Contains instructions on how to figure and estimate jobs. Use FREE COUPON below to examine, without obligation, this valuable work.

INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

Air Conditioning. Soldering, tinning. Joint wiping, bending, beating. Pipe—iron—steel, threading. Mathematics, tables, physics. Materials — iron, steel, copper, brass, lead, tin, antimony. Sheet metal — galvanized—plate. Sanitation, syphonage, tanks. Drainage, sewage, purification. Fixtures—bath—kitchen. Pipe fittings, soil pipe, tools. Laying out work. Roughing. Screwed fittings, flanges, joints. Pipe bending, examples. Elbows. Heating, ventilation, refrigeration. Water supply, mains, wells, tanks. Gas-fittings. Underwriters. Sheet metal work, problems, methods, Brazing, heating, lead burning. Welding, various welds, methods. Blacksmithing, forges, tools.

"Audels Guides are practical, easy to understand, reliable. Cover the field in plain language." **W. F. Arminger, Annapolis, Md.**



AUDELS MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDES—4 VOLS. $6

$1 PER MO.

A complete, illustrated trade reference library, for Bricklayers, Cement Workers, Plasterers, Tile Setters and Stone Masons, including a practical outline of Steel Construction. **1100 pages; 2067 diagrams; flexible; pocket size.** A practical Trade Assistant explaining modern methods of masonry construction. Easy to understand and apply. A reliable and authentic reference work and study-course for Master Journeyman and Young Mechanic. Use FREE COUPON below and find out for yourself, without obligation, whether this set will benefit you.

INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

Bricklaying, tools, materials; Brick designs, patterns, bonds; Setting frames and foundations; Mortars, scaffolds, estimating; Mortars and mortar mixing; Tile setting, mosaic, hollow tile; Straight edge test, troweling; How to figure brick work; Safe loads, piers, chimneys; Boiler settings, anchors, fire stops; Labor tables; Concrete, forms; How to figure concrete work; Stucco—on old and new buildings; Plastering—wood lath—metal; Plasterers agreement; Plastering on various surfaces; Stone masonry; Cutting, finishing, estimating stone; Derricks, rigging; Steel construction; Fire proof; How to read blue prints.

"Audels Masons G ides are the best books on the subject. Have laid brick 12 years and am able to judge." **H. A. Sonnett, Corliss, Pa.**

PRACTICAL ELECTRICITY—1 VOL. $4

$1 PER MO.

Audels Handy Book of Practical Electricity is a simplified Ready Reference and Study Course in one pocket size volume—for Engineers, Professional Electricians and Students. **1040 pages; 2600 diagrams; flexible bound.** A reliable authority and handy helper for every electrical worker. Contains important and valuable wiring diagrams, calculations, machine sketches, helps on maintenance and repair. Use this FREE COUPON today and find out, without obligation, how this handy book will help you in your daily work.

Complete in one handy, red leather bound volume

INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

Electro-Therapeutics, X-Rays, Shocks, Welding, Brazing, **Radio** Hook-ups, Motion Pictures, Telephone, Telegraph, Cranes, Bells, Elevators, Pumps, Tools, Ship Drive, Railways, Vehicles, Automobile Electric Systems, Ignition, Generation, Lighting, Plant Management, Power Plans, **Armature Winding,** Repairing, A. C. Motors and Apparatus, D. C. Motors and Apparatus, Alternator Construction, Dynamos, Wiring, Diagrams, Sign Flashers, Cable Splicing, **Power Wiring,** Outside Wiring, Switches, Lightning, Rectifiers, Converters, Transformers, Fuses, Circuit Breakers, Rheostats, Electro Plating, Electrolysis, **Storage Batteries,** Magnetism, Electrical Energy, Conductors, Insulators, Static, Dynamic, Radio Electricity, Applications, Ready Reference and Index Covering the entire field of Modern Electricity.

Learn More and You Will Earn More!

Know your job and you'll never be without one. The skilled man is always in demand. Knowledge is power. Learn your trade thoroughly by easy reading. This coupon is your opportunity for advancement and better pay. You risk nothing in sending for Audels Guides for *free examination.* Send it NOW!

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

THEO. AUDEL & CO.
49 W. 23 ST., NEW YORK CITY

Please mail me for **free examination** the books marked (x) below. If I find them satisfactory, I agree to mail $1 in 7 days, on each set ordered, and to further mail $1 monthly on each set until I have paid the purchase price.

☐ **4 CARPENTERS GUIDES $6** ☐ **4 PLUMBERS GUIDES $6**

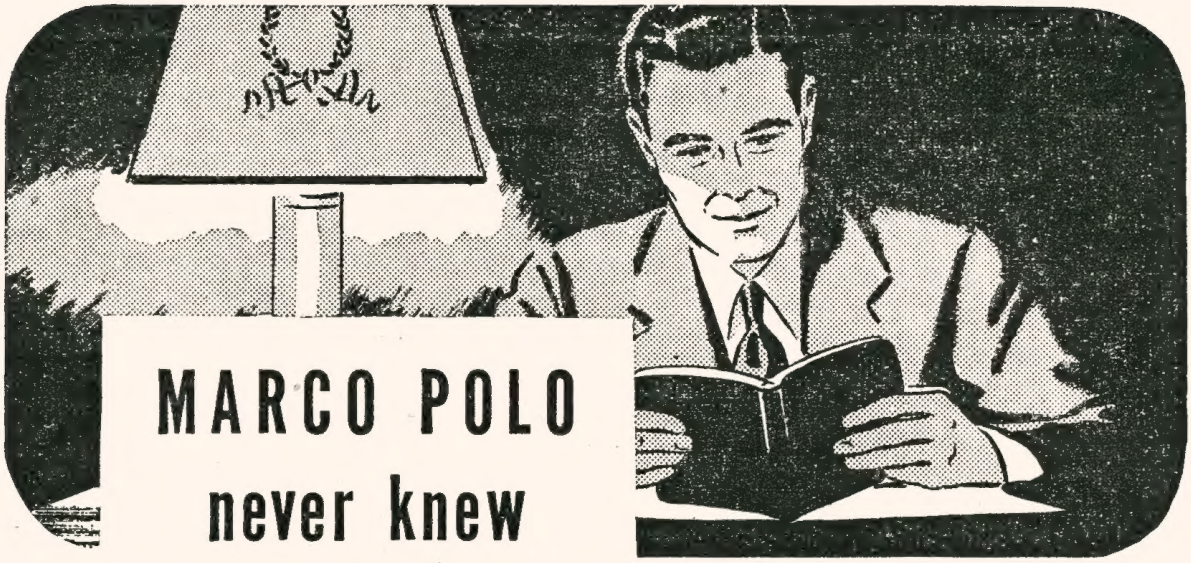
☐ **4 MASONS GUIDES $6** ☐ **1 ELECTRICIANS HANDY BOOK $4**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

OCCUPATION.....

REFERENCE..... JACK



MARCO POLO never knew GREATER THRILLS

BOLD MARCO POLO, pushing eastward into the unknown, never knew greater thrills of discovery than this student of the International Correspondence Schools! His I. C. S. text is his guide-book to new and thrilling adventures in the world of knowledge.

The I. C. S. student learns the *why* while he studies at night. The very next day, on his job, he experiences the grand ADVENTURE of seeing newly learned truths demonstrated.

For 47 years, the International Correspondence Schools have been training ambitious, adventuresome men. Today, many of them occupy high positions in Business and Industry—just as from the 100,000 I. C. S. students of today will come tomorrow's leaders, in many fields of business!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 4911-K, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Building Estimating
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Structural Draftsman
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Management of Inventions
☐ Electrical Engineer
☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Boilermaker
☐ Telegraph Engineer
☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio
☐ Mechanical Engineering
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker
☐ Patternmaker
☐ Diesel Engines
☐ Aviation Engines
☐ Auto Technician
☐ Auto Electrical Technician
☐ Commercial Refrigeration
☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting
☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation
☐ Air Conditioning and Cooling
☐ Steam Engineer
☐ Steam Electric Engineer
☐ Marine Engineer
☐ R. R. Locomotives
☐ R. R. Section Foreman
☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen
☐ Highway Engineering
☐ Civil Engineering
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Coal Mining
☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Bosses
☐ Navigation
☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Agriculture
☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management
☐ Industrial Management
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Accountancy
☐ Cost Accountant
☐ C. P. Accountant
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Secretarial Work
☐ Spanish
☐ French
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Service Station Salesmanship
☐ First Year College Subjects
☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ High School Subjects
☐ College Preparatory
☐ Illustrating
☐ Cartooning
☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

☐ Home Dressmaking
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
☐ Advanced Dressmaking
☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
If you reside in England, send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

WS—1E

STREET AND SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

EVERY WEEK

Yearly Subscription, $4.00 Six Months, $2.00 Single Copies, 10 Cents

Vol. CLXXI Contents for February 18, 1939 No. 5

TWO NOVELS

FUNERAL MOUNTAIN . . . . . Tom Roan 9
A Chinese Buddha hidden high in the Sierras spelled mystery—and doom—to Phil Seldon. . . .

THE MAKING OF A BUCKAROO . . Ney N. Geer 63
Potluck Jones' course of training was guaranteed to make a top hand out of any dude—if it didn't kill him first!

A SERIAL

ACES COME HIGH—Part III . . . . Jackson Gregory 89
Was death waiting to keep a rendezvous with Ross Haveril at the Valdez's gay fiesta?

SHORT STORIES

SMOKY JUDGMENT DAY . . . . . Harry F. Olmsted 39
Though Carse Corbus' backtrail was shrouded in mystery, the T Down crew was willing to give him a chance at the job they had fallen down on. . . .

HATE RIDES VALLEY PASS . . . . . Eugene R. Dutcher . . . 51
. . and Bob Huxley learns that vengeance can be a dangerous boomerang.

CUNNING OF THE DAMNED . . . . . Kenneth Gilbert 81
Driven into a truce with her ancient enemy, old Makoos gained a fighting chance to save her precious burden. . . .

WESTERN STORY FEATURES

PULLIN' LEATHER . . . . . S. Omar Barker 50
—A poem of the range. . . .

THE STORY OF THE WEST . . . . . Gerard Delano 76
Episode XLI in the making of the cattle country.

THE BULLARD RIFLE . . . . . Phil Sharpe 78
The Bullard is a forgotten firearm today, but it did its bit toward shaping the history of our country.

DEPARTMENTS

The Roundup . . . . . The Editor 5
Where To Go And How To Get There . . John North 99
Mines And Mining . . . . . John A. Thompson 101
The Hollow Tree . . . . . Helen Rivers 103
Missing 106

THIS MAGAZINE CONTAINS NEW STORIES ONLY. NO REPRINTS ARE USED.

All characters used in fiction and semi-fiction stories in this magazine are fictitious. Any similarity in name or characterization to persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Allen L. Grammer, President; Henry W. Ralston, Vice President and Treasurer. Copyright, 1939, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1939, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Canada, Cuba, Dom. Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries, except The Guianas and British Honduras, $5.00 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, $7.00 per year. We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. To facilitate handling, the author should inclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached, and artists should inclose or forward return postage. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission. 16

THE ROUNDUP

MUCH has been said pro and con concerning whether or not a horse will come to its owner when he whistles. Not long ago a reader raised this perennial question concerning one of Tom Roan's stories, so we asked Tom what his experience had been. This is what he said:

"As to a horse coming when one whistles—I can do that with any horse, providing it eats sugar. Occasionally, of course, you find a horse that won't touch it, but you can try this experiment yourself. Get the lump of sugar and hold it in the horse's mouth until the sugar melts. Once you get a horse taking it you're going places, and in three days you can't lose the brute. Why he'll even try and pull the spots off of your chaps!"

Well, that's one way. We wonder if any of our other readers have any other information to offer on this subject? We'll be mighty glad to know, case you have.

We'd like to tell you of an experience we had just recently. While on our way to the office the other morning, we suddenly found ourselves the center of as fine a traffic tangle as this man's town can put on. It happened at a cross street where there seemed to be no regular traffic cop, and great was our surprise, after dodging a miscellaneous assortment of trucks and cars, to find ourselves safely on the sidewalk and face to face with as sweet a police pony as we've seen in many a day! Above the din of motors and shifting gears we heard a man's thin whistle and the pony, his sensitive ears pointed, turned and carefully picked his way over to the corner where his officer was making order out of bedlam. Wisely we decided it was neither the time nor place to go into matters with the mounty as to how he'd trained his horse, but we see him every morning and we'll find out one of these days.

But to get back to Tom Roan, whose story FUNERAL MOUNTAIN is featured in this issue, he knows his ranges and his cow camps. He tells me that he was peeling broncs before he was fifteen for the Pendergast brothers down in Texas. He is thoroughly familiar, too, with the Powder River country of Montana. Tom rode with Tom Mix and his first wife, Ollie, for the Weidman Brothers Wild West show. Roan did trick riding and big loop catching. He was the first man who spun a rope in Hawaii and says he startled all the Kanakees trying it.

"Horses are kind of my line," he says, "and I think I know as much about them as the next fellow. My father was a horseman—a trader—and you might say I was born looking horses in the eye!

We're always glad to receive appreciative letters like the one which John A. Thompson, who conducts our Mines and Mining Department, passed on to us the other day. It comes from C. M. Cornett, a reader in San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Cornett has this to say:

"By personal experience I have found that you give thorough and conservative advice on the various places that you have described in your splendid department. To say

the least, these items are a boon to Western Story Magazine."

We want to thank Mr. Cornett for expressing this appreciation and also to wish that he will always find "pay dirt." We want also to take this opportunity to mention, again, that the weekly departments of Western Story are meant to be of service to you. Any suggestions that you have concerning them, as well as any criticisms you may care to make, will be gratefully accepted.

The many friends of Potluck Jones (whose latest adventures are recounted on page 63) will be interested in the note we received from Ney N. Geer a few days ago. "Just finished another book-length Potluck Jones novel and you will be seeing it very shortly," he writes. "I hope you like it for I sure used the best ideas I had in stock." We judge that even now the manuscript is on its way from Oregon, where the author lives, and here's hoping that it will be one of the best of the new feature-length novels Western Story will give its readers during the coming year.

Coming in next week's big issue—

A thrilling full-length murder mystery by W. Ryerson Johnson. Terror reigned in the little town of Gold Hill as a phantom killer struck again and again. Only one man dared defy the elusive marauder, and he, too, was marked with the sign of the Red Horseshoe. That was the situation that confronted the Pima Kid when he came to place his famed guns at the service of a harassed citizenry. Would he succeed where others had failed? Don't miss SIGN OF THE RED HORSESHOE, a story filled with suspense, thrills and a whirlwind climax that will leave you gasping.

It takes a lot to make an Indian horse give his allegiance to a white man, and not until Slim Carson had to fight for his life against a pair of murdering renegades did he discover that he had what it took. The hero of TORNADO TAMER, by Paul Ellsworth Triem, is Thunderbolt, a one-man horse who was willing to give his life for the master he finally accepted.

Big George Griffin always did have a hankering to wear a silver badge on his shirt front, and he was more than willing to step into the boots of Yellow Butte's runaway sheriff. Willie Joe was on hand, too, to make the course of true love run smoother for the Romeo and Juliet of the rangelands, whose dads got their fun out of life from scrapping with each other. If you're a Big and Willie admirer—and who isn't?—don't overlook GUN-FIGHTING FATHERS, by E. C. Lincoln.

Laramie Hoyt knew he couldn't cut much of a figure on a dance floor, but on the snow-swept mesa, with a wailing blizzard for music, he was willing to bet he could call a dance not even Dell Young could follow. In LARAMIE CALLS THE DANCE, Cherry Wilson writes a powerful, fast-moving tale of a cowpuncher who almost let a moment's jealousy ruin his life.

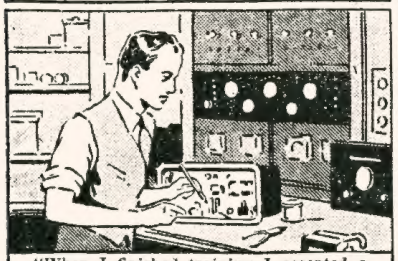
REDHEAD'S LUCK was what Sacatone Red usually attributed his success to, but other folks had an idea it might have something to do with pluck. Watch for L. P. Holmes' newest tale of the famous range detective. Besides this big line-up of top-notch stories, there'll be another installment of ACES COME HIGH, by Jackson Gregory, and interesting articles and features by John A. Thompson, Gerard Delano, John North and many others.

I jumped from $18 a week to $50
-- a Free Book started me toward this
GOOD PAY IN RADIO

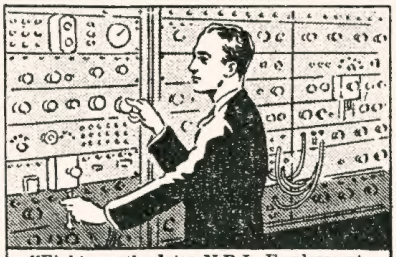
HERE'S
How it Happened
by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

"I had an $18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."

"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5, $10, $15 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N.R.I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI. I am also connected with Television Station W9XK."

"N.R.I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast. The field is wide open to properly trained men."

J. E. SMITH,
President
National Radio Institute
Established 1914

Find out today how I Train You at Home to BE A RADIO EXPERT

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many $200 to $500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to $6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems, are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra In Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—$200 to $500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH,
President,
Dept. 9BD,
National Radio Institute,
Washington,
D C.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9BD
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out spare time and full time opportunities in Radio, and explains your practical method of training at home in spare time to become a Radio Expert. (Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address .....

City..... State.....

CAN IT HAPPEN HERE?

Newspapers, today and yesterday, report trains, boats, and airplanes wrecked and missing; people of prominence vanish without leaving a trace. Investigation hints that all of these are associated with the phenomena of strangely colored lights.

Founded on these facts, Eric Frank Russell has written "Sinister Barrier," a most astonishing story. You will live with its characters through the most unusual experience in your life. It's a story destined to take its place with "War of the Worlds," by H. G. Wells, "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," by Jules Verne, "The Lost World," by Conan Doyle and "Outward Bound," by Sutton Vane.

SINISTER BARRIER

By Eric Frank Russell

In The Big 160-page March Issue Of

UNKNOWN

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

ON SALE FEB. 10 20c PER COPY

FUNERAL MOUNTAIN

by TOM ROAN

Funeral Mountain

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL IN SCARLET

WEAVING drunkenly, worn out with fatigue and the loss of blood, Phil Seldon came out of the dense forest at the timberline. His gray beaded buckskin jacket was smeared down the right shoulder with an ugly splotch of red, his throat parched for the want of water, and only four cartridges were left in his heavy gun belts for the ivory-butted .45s at his lean hips.

He knew he was almost through. He walked as if on a dead man's legs, spurred heels dragging, a lone and forlorn figure in the wildest, tallest and roughest mountain peak country of the lofty California-Sierras. He was high in the Devil's Minarets, far up on the great slopes of Stars of Heaven Divide. Around him loomed snow-capped peaks and crags banking away against late afternoon sky. In the far distance, as if just to tantalize his burning thirst, a river tore and tossed in a mighty cataract down a mountainside, a sparkling ribbon racing down from the melting ice and snow on a great peak with its crown wrapped in a silvery halo of clouds.

Even now he could hear bullets droning in the timber behind him; bullets fired from high-powered rifles. For Phil Seldon was on the run, and on the run from big-hatted, hard-riding and straight-shooting men he had never seen before. An hour before dawn, down in other wild hills and peaks to southward, he had been routed out of his blankets on the bank of a meandering stream with the dead silence of his lonely little camp broken by the sudden blazing of guns and the whine, the slap and cry of bullets.

His big bay saddler and his tall sorrel pack horse had been killed in their tracks, ruthlessly shot down as they stood peacefully grazing in their hobbles on the deep grass just below the camp. Only his quick-wittedness had enabled Seldon to escape, plunging out into the darkness with his guns, his boots and clothing in his arms. A strange figure in the night, he had gone scurrying away, plunging into a deep ravine and keeping grimly to it with all the black world around him crackling with spontaneous firing and the licking tongues of blazing powder spurting from the muzzles of rifles.

Not yet did Seldon know why he had been jumped upon so mercilessly. Not yet did he know why those men, at least a dozen of them, kept trailing him so relentlessly, driving him higher and higher into the hills. No one in all this remote cattle and sheep country of California could possibly know that he had any connection whatever with the United States post office department. No one back here could possibly suspect him of being anything other than some young prospector venturing into this old gold mining region in search of yellow metal among the worked-out diggings and lonely ghost towns of the lower valleys and deep canyons.

He had been a cowpuncher until five weeks ago, and back in the high hill country of the wilds of northern Idaho not even his closest friends knew that he had become a government agent. The job had demanded absolute secrecy from the start. He had been picked by the government because he was a man who absolutely would not be known, one who could casually drift down to Texas

and pick up the trail of a gang of train robbers and trail them to hell-and-gone to bring back to government hands a million dollars' worth of gold bonds.

A LITTLE cluster of pines, a mere thicket of green on the bald mountain dome above the timberline, lay ahead of him now. In it there might be a tiny waterhole. His eyes kindled with a gleam of hope. It was only a short distance away, but he was in the open again, and once more he heard bullets crying around him, coming from the side of a mountain across a canyon to westward.

Something knocked him to his knees when he reached the trees. It was another bullet, one that slapped him above and behind the left ear, a spent blow that did not even break the skin, but was enough to pitch him forward.

He got up awkwardly, and saw eight excellently mounted men now crowding toward him from the eastern side of the slope. His six-shooters would be no good against them. They were too far away for .45s to talk business with, and they had rifles. He saw one mounted man pull up with a jerk. Another flung himself out of his saddle and dropped to one knee.

A ringing, crashing report that came with mysterious suddenness seemed to turn the tide of everything. It came out of the pines just ahead of Seldon, and right on the heels of it there was another, a third, a fourth. The man in the distance staggered to his feet, rifle flying out of his hands, teetered and sprawled on his face.

Rising fiercely but muffled by the distance, the man with the aiming rifle on the horse was the next to go. Seldon saw him reel in his saddle, saw his rifle drop, and then he rolled backward on the rump of his horse. The horse pitched crazily to one side, and the man dropped like a spinning, rimless cartwheel to the ground to bounce just once on the hard earth and become still.

For the next few minutes it was like the opening guns of a hotly contested war on a raging battlefield. The death-dealing shots from the pine thicket continued, a steady crashing and rolling of sounds that were playing havoc with the ambushers.

Seldon saw another man go, a dropping figure tumbling out of a saddle. The man got up, crouching, with both hands gripped to his stomach. Seldon saw him trying to catch his horse, saw another man trying to help him. The lunging animal between them and Seldon blotted out the picture. The horse reared, plunged himself into the air until every hoof was off the ground, and then pitched forward on his shoulders and the side of his neck, his dying bawl an eerie wail rolling across the slope.

Now the men over there to eastward were snatching up their dead or sorely wounded, and were flinging themselves back, each rider whipping and spurring his horse mercilessly. Each man was fighting desperately to get back into the dark shadow and dense cover of the timber.

The shots still poured from the thicket and other riders were now appearing on the high slope of the peak above the pines. There were six of the newcomers, each man mounted on a fine horse, and to Seldon's surprise he saw the men leaving their saddles as they halted their animals in the rocks and came on afoot to start shooting at the group rushing to eastward as well as turn-

ing to open a hot firing on the other half-hidden men on the slope of the mountain beyond the mile-deep canyon to westward.

With the battle still raging, the bursting ringing of shots filling the slope and punctuated by distant yells of pain and savage cries of rage, Seldon moved on. His head ached like a throbbing drum, and sometimes the sheer pain of it blinded him. The blow of the spent bullet was making him sick to his stomach. He stopped once more, and crouched forward with his hands on his knees while he tried to peer through the heavy, ground-sweeping limbs of the trees to the center of the thicket.

The shots kept right on blasting away, the sounds rolling waves of fury, and Seldon half-expected to find himself facing bullets that would be turned upon him from the center of the trees. Yet, as he thought of it, such a thing was not exactly logical. Certainly whoever was firing from back here in the trees had seen him coming, and had they wanted to shoot him it could have been done long ago. And that meant that whoever was keeping up this rapid firing was protecting him, for the time at least.

Leaving his six-shooters in their holsters and keeping his hands carefully away from their bright butts, he pushed on, with twigs and small limbs flying off the trees above him to show that the men in the timber to eastward—now out of sight in the forest and returning the fire from the thicket—were trying to follow his line of movement with their bullets.

Brazenly now, walking on like a lone victim caught between the two fighting factions of a field of war, Seldon was trusting everything to fate. At the end of ten rods, he pushed through the last low mass of limbs and came to a startled halt with his mouth suddenly gaping and his eyes widening until they bulged in their sockets.

Now Philip Seldon knew that he was seeing things! Confound it, something was wrong with his eyes, something had gone sadly wrong inside his head and was making him a vision-seeing fool!

For in front of him was a round clearing about forty yards across and flanked with enormous stone benches surrounding a circular pavement of flat stones carefully and evenly placed together. But it was not just that that startled him. It was the huge ungodly thing facing him from the absolute center of the clearing—something no man almost straight from Idaho would have expected to find up here in these high hills.

IT was a monstrous stone god, a great-bellied, jade-eyed thing lavishly ornamented with wrought and carved brass, a cross-legged idol, hewn and carved from a great mass of solid stone. Its right hand dropped between its knees, the other clasped flat across its stomach. It was an image of the great Oriental Buddha, a masterpiece of Chinese brasswork and stone carving fully thirty feet high and nearly twenty feet thick.

Even as Seldon stared at it, a puff of pale-blue, quickly-vanishing smoke jerked from behind the great monument's left shoulder. It was another shot, the crashing ring of a rifle again sending its far reverberating report over the thicket and bounding and rocketing away across the slope.

Then the unbelievable happened again. In a sudden stir of wind, something fluttered like the scarlet wings of a great, gorgeous butterfly, seemingly floating down from behind the huge throne seat. There was a

scraping sound of booted and spurred feet on the stone. A few seconds later the most amazingly beautiful girl Phil Seldon had ever seen stepped quietly from behind the idol and came to face him, with a rifle cradled in the crook of her left arm.

CHAPTER II

INTO THE BUDDHA

NOT even in his wildest fancies had Phil Seldon ever visioned a girl like this. She was like something out of a picture. She was about five feet and five inches tall, and beautifully slender and graceful. Her face was so fair it was almost startling, her nose uptilted a mere trifle, and perfect teeth glistened as she smiled at him. He saw that her hair was soft and brown. The color of the trees was in her eyes, with sunlight turning them to bright emeralds.

Her garb was just as amazing. Save for spurs of bright metal and dainty black boots of fine Russian leather, a cartridge belt around her slight waist and another over her right shoulder, and the mother-of-pearl butts of silver-mounted six-shooters peeping from beneath the flowing folds of her loose cape, she might have been some red flame of a ravishing Cossack beauty with a black turban on her head, stepping forth on a stage to do a turn before a royal box.

Seconds passed without a word. Seldon could only stand and stare with his hands outspread beside him, looking as if his long boot heels and big spurs had nailed him to the spot. He stirred long enough to remove his big hat, and told himself in the back of his thoughts that he was dreaming. A half-croaking sound came from his throat, but he did not find his voice completely until a bullet droned overhead from eastward to smack the left shoulder of the image of the great Buddha a sickening *plop!* that brought a shower of fine stone sprinkling down on the girl.

"They're still shooting, ma'am!" It was an inane beginning. He blurted it out like some peddler hawking his wares in the Mexican quarter of a Texas border town. "You're in danger here."

"And all the worse for you because you lost your rifle on the western slope of Friendly Brother Butte." she spoke easily. There was not even a hint of nervousness in her voice, and all the time she was studying him, looking him up and down from the top of his curly brown head to the dusty toes of his boots. "We've been watching your flight and fight since ten o'clock this morning. We see everything up here. At first we thought it another one of Hole-in-the-Head Hank Hossler's tricks. We laughed at it until we saw you kill a horse from under Hossler with a thousand-yard shot just before you lost your rifle. Welcome to Funeral Mountain, stranger, until you or your hostess find it best otherwise. I am Loretta Lord, daughter of the late Gabriel Lord. Perhaps you have heard of me in the lower country."

"I . . . I'm Phil . . . Philip Seldon, ma'am." Damn, he could have sworn that his voice sounded exactly like the bleat of a frightened goat. "I was doing a little prospecting," he was adding this awkwardly, and as if the lie was sticking in his throat, "until this morning. My camp was jumped without warning before daylight and—"

"Yes, I know," she cut in. "We have odd ways of knowing many things up here, Mr. Seldon. Your outfit had all the earmarks of a real

prospector's outfit, and yet"—the bright, emerald-green eyes narrowed ever so slightly—"you must have come in a very straight line with very little prospecting on the way since you left Coarse Gold four nights ago. One of my men saw you there."

"Well, you see, ma'am. You see, it—"

"No, I don't see," she interrupted again, a roguish little smile moving her pretty lips. "I only mentioned a mere fact, Mr. Seldon. Up here, especially on Funeral Mountain behind me, we do not ask many questions. We rarely answer them. Besides this is not the proper place for long conversation. We are safe enough for the moment. The timber protects us down here at the foot of Buddha. Perhaps the Chinese miners who erected the image had that in mind. But everything may not remain like this much longer. If you will come with me we will be going. You seem to be wounded, and I have the reputation of being a fair doctor when it comes to patching cuts and mending holes left by bullets. If you don't mind"—she stepped to one side and waved her right hand—"I'll trouble you to walk in front of me."

She smiled again, but, nevertheless, her last words were a thinly-veiled command. It told Phil Seldon that this girl could be as cool as ice if the situation demanded it, could be even deadly dangerous. The markings were there. She was an offshoot beauty of some hard-steel fighting breed of these high mountains, and the thing to do was not to cross her in the least.

"As you say, Miss Lord." He managed a grin and moved on past her. "Point the way. You won't need even a jerk-line. I drive well."

THE shooting had died to scattering shots by this time. Only now and then did a bullet *whaa-aa-ng!* into the thicket. The men up the slope north of the image of Buddha seemed to be saving their cartridges, and only an occasional shot came from westward across the canyon.

"To your left, please," directed the girl. "It'll look spooky at first, but you will soon not mind it—thanks to the yellow people who once farmed Funeral Mountain and the surrounding country for gold in the old days."

He was just past the Buddha. A great, yard-thick slab of stone stood like an open door in the rear wall of the throne seat. It revealed an arched opening where a smoky lantern was burning on the top step of a narrow flight of stone stairs leading down into the earth. As Seldon moved into the opening, the girl spoke again.

"Take the lantern, please," she ordered. "You might turn up the wick just a trifle."

He picked up the lantern, and slowly started down the time-worn stone steps. The girl halted him long enough to swing the great door closed and throw several wrought-iron bars in place. Now everything was as black as ink, and the faint, far sound of water came to Seldon's ears, reminding him that his throat was parched with thirst.

"May the soul of Sin Song Ming and all his followers be blessed," murmured the girl, turning now to follow Seldon, "and may the great Buddha stand forever!' Then, after a moment, she added quietly, "For as the Buddha often protected Sin Song Ming and his harassed followers in the past, he has protected me—and my father and mother long before my coming."

They were strange words, coming from a voice as gentle as a benediction. Seldon did not understand it. He did not try. There was much here for a man to puzzle over, and he realized it. He would merely wait, and by his waiting he would learn many things.

CHAPTER III

THE TEMPLE OF MING

IT was a world all of its own, one that had seen bitter strife and ruthless warfare from almost the beginning of the old gold-rush days of 1849 until this late afternoon when Phil Seldon saw the first outlying hint of the old workings. The girl told him things that other old-timers of this far-back mountain country also could have told him.

Men from all over the world had heard the call of gold after California's great strike had become known. Many Chinese had been among the scores of treasure-seekers. Yellow men had rushed across the Pacific Ocean as rapidly as every known variety of seagoing sailing ship of the times could bring them. Among them had come one Master Ming, a gentleman and a scholar, a poor but devout follower of the ancient Buddha; a man with the honorable blood of the rulers of the Ming dynasty in his veins.

A hardy horde had followed him to these high hills, and back up here they struck it rich, so rich that it brought down on Master Ming's lowly head the curse and envy of the mobs of white ruffians less fortunate in their gold farming along the creeks and in the lower hills where the atmosphere was not so high and cold, where the trails were more passable—and whiskey and rowdy night life in the dance halls not so hard to get.

No one had known the wealth of Master Ming. Robber bands had invaded his little kingdom. Many of his followers had been killed. A great deal of gold had been carried off in numerous raids. But Ming had prospered despite the plundering. More followers had flocked to him. Some suffered the same fate as the others, and Master Ming buried them on the top of his mountain where the cold winds blew their icy breaths in the dead heat of summer over the lowlands, and where the snow sometimes piled sixty feet deep in the drifts when the shades of winter fell.

"Men robbed him of much gold," explained the girl, "and killed many of his men, but none robbed him of his right to set up his temple in these hills and carve his Buddhas on the slopes."

The winding stairway had taken them down for all of eighty feet through solid rock. It had turned northward, and then had entered one of the passageways of a great cavern where an underground river spilled with monotonous thunder in the eternal darkness somewhere far down in the bowels of the earth. The lantern light was a mere blob here in all this vast darkness where the underground trail wound its perilous way along the lips of fathomless pools of ink-black emptiness and twisted through great-vaulted rooms with ebony ceilings so high overhead the puny glow failed entirely to reach them.

Seldon had not expected the girl to talk so freely with him, and yet he noticed that she spoke only of the dim, far past. Not once again had she mentioned the name of Hole-in-the-Head Hank Hossler. Even the story of Master Ming had been sketchy enough, one that she seemed to tell him merely to occupy

his thoughts and keep him from asking questions.

They came at last to a place where light poured down from a jagged crack in the rocks high overhead. Here were two horses, a big bay, and a fine black saddler with all the slender markings of a Kentucky racer. It was the girl's. Seldon would have known that if the horse had stood among fifty others. The animal wore a handsome Spanish saddle, trimmed with silver and intricate spatter-work of gold.

Beyond the horses stood a round, bowllike pool fed and kept filled with an icy seepage of water running through a crack. Seldon headed straight for it to drink with deep, satisfying gulps. When he straightened, the girl had removed a pair of heavy saddlebags from her horse's saddle.

"And now that wound," she told him simply. "We have been a long time getting at it, but it will be better than never at all."

It was done swiftly, neatly, and with almost surgical skill. That hole in his shoulder, still seeping blood, became a mere scratch under her magic hands. From the saddlebags she produced everything one could have needed for a wound. There was cotton, clean gauze, an antiseptic that stung like forty horses trying to kick down the walls of a stable, and when it was over, she brushed away the beads of perspiration on his forehead with her handkerchief.

"No bone touched," she assured him. "A clean, straight-through shot. You'll be as good as a new man in a few days, Mr. Seldon."

He thanked her, and a few minutes later they were riding on. She had thought of everything. Seeing his plight from a lookout station high up somewhere in the peaks, she had brought the big, strong, surefooted horse for him to ride, knowing that it was too far for a wounded man to walk to her place—wherever that was.

She set Phil Seldon's thoughts to whirling with the wildest notions. Confound it, he liked this girl! One look into a man's face from those amazingly bright, amazingly green eyes, one delightful smile from those perfect lips, and any poor devil would find himself hopelessly lost and drawn to her in a measure that was absolutely desperate. Love at first sight and nothing short of it!

HE had heard of her long before he had reached the town of Coarse Gold. He had heard her name mentioned by a burly ruffian in a drinking dive deep down in the hills. Not much had been said, and Seldon had been too wise to try to question the fellow. Now he knew that the drunken lout had never seen Lorretta Lord, judging from the description he had given of her. But Seldon was remembering other things he had heard. It was said that outlaws were her henchmen. She took them in, fed them, cared for their wounds. A fresh horse, a belt of cartridges and even a pair of guns were a wanted man's for the mere asking. She could tell men where to go, where to hide in these lofty mountains, the jagged peaks and shaggy crags.

That much—as far as hiding wanted men and helping them was concerned—was probably true. Seldon had not heard of Master Ming. He had not heard a word of the stone and brass Buddha.

After they had gone on for ninety yards, they had to ride close together, so close that at times the

girl's left knee touched his right. They were in a great passageway, and she had taken the lantern, hanging it forward on the side of her saddle so that the light would shine between them and on ahead.

They crossed a long bridge made of thick logs and covered with sand and fine gravel. Below them, far down in the black gash of an underground gorge below the bridge, the subterranean river sobbed, roared and thundered with the noise of guns and thunder. Then they were going up and up a steep slope. For a thousand yards they followed it. Finally they rounded a sharp bend to the right, then another quick bend to the left.

Now Lorretta Lord blew out the flickery flame of the lantern, and sat it between two others on a shoulder-high ledge to her right. For dying daylight and blue sky could be seen looming ahead, and they were soon emerging from a great cave mouth to the high, round base of a towering peak.

An icy wind swooped against their faces as they moved on. All around were little patches of snow scattered over the green grass. They were as good as on top of the world. Miles and miles of great mountain ranges stood in every direction. Bald peaks lifted above the timberline with their tops white with snow. The sun had already gone down, leaving only a rainbow of gold in the west while the sky to the east had become a startlingly clear sheet of royal blue ribboned here and there with a feathery billow of white clouds slowly drifting into the settling night.

"And now you know, when you look at all this," exclaimed the girl with a wave of a black-gloved hand, "why the honorable old Sin Song Ming called this great range Stars of Heaven Divide."

"It takes my breath away," he said half-lamely, a man awed by the overwhelming beauty all around him. "But you never finished telling me what happened to Ming."

"I didn't," she admitted. "But you might have guessed it. The white man is so relentless when he starts to do a thing. He never lets up. Ming's broken bones lie over there in that little graveyard where he buried the rest of his dead to keep them until he could return their bodies to China."

She pointed to a strange conglomeration of rocks off to the right and half-hidden beyond a long fringe of snowbrush. No yellow man was left to tell the tale. It took but little imagination to see that those up-edged rocks were markers for graves.

"All were wiped out one summer night," explained the girl. "Nothing was left except Ming's stone and brass gods and his temple. That is the temple up there."

She pointed upward. Until now Phil Seldon had not looked up at the spiraling peak in the center of the high flat. He even had to tilt back his head to see the top of it. But there was the temple! It sat high in the air, its sloping Oriental roofs mottled with snow. It was like a castle in the sky, its multitudes of windows and doors set with countless little panes of glass. A winding trail led up to it with the outer edge of the trail walled with heavy stones. Around it were frowning ramparts of log and stone. From these, small batteries of rusty iron cannon looked down at the round plain around the base of the peak, and from hidden chimneys farther back on the sloping, high-curved eaves of the roofs, poured ribbons of pale-blue smoke

bannering and blowing crookedly away in the icy wind.

"The temple of Ming," the girl half-whispered. "My grandfather came here after Ming and his men were murdered. With powder and ball Anvil Lord ruled. My father, Gabriel Lord, fell heir to it when Grandfather Anvil fell one day while facing rustler lead. I took over when my father died from bullets in his back fired by dry-gulchers hired by Hole-in-the-Head Hank Hossler. Welcome to my castle, Mr. Seldon. I never ask a man's business until after—"

Something halted her. It was like the faint, far-away *pop* of a cork being removed from a champagne bottle. It came from the temple, a sound floating down on the wind, and behind it there was something like a muffled cry of pain or fear well started but choked short in the uttering.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEAD WAILS

THE girl hastily pulled her horse to a halt. Phil Seldon reined in beside her with a twist of his reins. She turned her head and looked at him, glanced up at the castlelike house on the peak, and looked back at him. For the first time since he had looked into them back down there at the huge Buddha, he saw a flash of fear in her eyes. It almost surprised him.

"What is it?" He asked the question bluntly, and in a tone that was a demand for a direct reply. "I've come this far with you, Miss Lord. It looks like I'm going all the way. Even if there is something here that I should not know—"

"Soon you would know it anyway, yes," she finished the sentence for him. "There would be no way to keep it from you. Even now, after all you have seen, you might guess a great deal."

"And I do guess as well as see," he nodded. "Seeing is always believing. You and the Hossler crowd, whatever or whoever they may be, are hard down to war, and each having a sweet time to keep the other from getting the winning hand."

"Hossler almost has the winning hand." She smiled faintly. "He has played havoc with my herds. He's killed off my men. He gets help from the law while I have help from no one except the men who come here willing to fight for me without thought of pay when the times are going against us. We fought Hossler men today. We fought them a week ago. Their ranch lies over there, fifteen miles from us through the shortest way." She pointed to a great ridge to westward. "Hole-in-the-Head Hank and Fighting Father Frank rule all that country west of Rampart Ridge—all the way to Thunderbird Divide. But come. We'll ride as we talk."

Once started, she was free with the story. Hank Hossler still believed there was gold cached somewhere in or around the old temple. Many others believed the same thing. The old workings were at every hand. Dark, caving-in holes were everywhere, in the hard ground of this flat surrounding the peak, in the sides of the peak itself, and dug deep into the hills farther down the slopes.

An army of yellow men had once worked here, slaving away in shifts night and day, the picks and shovels never idle. A great amount of gold had been carried away when the last fighting horde of outlaw whites and renegade Digger Indians had made the final, blood-spouting raid on Master Ming. For many months the gang had remained here, hunt-

ing, prying and searching. At last they had fought against themselves. The Indians had been killed off, shot down without a chance to fight.

And then Anvil Lord had come, pushing a great Texas herd of cattle through these hills. He had been a powerful man, six feet and six inches of hard-gutted fighting brawn and blood, and backed by his own crew of pistol-popping and knife-flashing gun devils. Anvil Lord had whipped, bullied and shot down all opposition. His cattle had spread over the hills. More cattle and fine horses had followed. As far as eye could see, the man had ruled, his horses and cattle becoming the pick of California. Lord was his name, and as a lord he had bossed his lofty world until men who had aroused his straight-shooting ire shuddered in their boots when they thought of him.

"His friends swore by him, fought by him, and died by him," explained the girl proudly. "His enemies branded him as the devil's half brother, and the anvil and tongs of hell to boot! I remember him as the handsomest man I ever knew, yet he was killed when I was only five. He grew frightfully rich up here. Gabriel Lord, my father, was not the man Anvil was. Gabriel spent a fortune trying to buy peace where Grandfather Anvil burned strong black powder and gave his enemies only six feet under to starve the buzzards and keep the air pure."

THEY were coming to the top of the peak by this time. Seldon could see that it was larger than it looked from the base. It was like the crater of some volcano. It had all the markings, and without a doubt it had been one that flamed and raged thousands upon thousands of years before the coming of the first man. It was about nine hundred feet across, sunken in the center, making a natural corral for the thirty horses Seldon could see in front of a long line of stone and mud stables banked against the east side of the black rocks.

The castlelike house was even larger than it had looked from below. Another stone and brass Buddha stood in front of it, and on the east side of the broad veranda that ran around the entire house were eight men, hardened-looking fellows, each a two-gun man if the weapons at his hips were to be believed.

One of the men stirred forward. Another hesitated and followed as if somebody had whispered a command beside him. As Seldon and the girl dismounted, the men took charge of the horses. The girl gave no hint of an introduction, and Seldon could tell that she had become tense with some anticipation as he followed her on to the veranda. Just before they stepped upon it, a tall, black-bearded man in black moved forward, removing his big hat.

"I reckon there won't be no use in gettin' excited, Miss Lord," he began. "The boys have kinda made me spokesman. I . . . er . . . well, I sorta don't know how to begin it—"

"Let me have it straight from the shoulder, Garrett!" the girl ordered crisply. "What is it?"

"Well, ma'am," stammered the man, looking at his hat and turning it awkwardly in his hands, "we've had another one of them things happen."

"You mean?"

"Another man killed, yes," nodded Garrett. "We was back at the corral. We'd unsaddled an' was settin' on the fence when we heard the shot. We rushed in, some comin' in on one

side, some on the other so that anybody runnin' out coulda been seen. Nobody run out. It was just like the other killin's. Fate Brindlee's in there with the whole top of his head shot off, an' we heard that strange yell ag'in, just like before. This time I'd swear, ma'am, it was a laugh—a sort of a choking laugh. Excuse me, ma'am, but it was the damnedest sound I ever heard in all my life, an' the rest of the boys'll back me up in what I say."

But the girl was not listening. She was pushing on. Seldon kept at her heels. They passed through a great front door into a great living room with hand-carved beams and blackwood carvings on the walls, a massive room with massive furniture, a brass Buddha half-smiling in the far corner to the left and on a throne of teakwood.

Seldon merely glanced at his surroundings. He was watching the girl. She was going straight forward toward the south end of a great, deeply-carved table. The odor of blood and dead gun smoke was already in Seldon's nostrils.

There, outstretched on the huge Oriental rug lay the body of a man. It was a six-foot figure, broad-shouldered, deep-chested. Powerful, reddish-haired hands were thrust out on either side of him. His legs were as straight as legs could possibly be. His mouth was open. Though the matted blood Seldon could see the big, bulging brown eyes, eyes that seemed to register terror even in death; eyes that had seen something before death struck him down.

"An' he's straightened out like a cross, ma'am, as yuh can see." Garrett was speaking again. "Just like they laid out Bob Wind, Old Frank, the Nameless Dude, an' another'n' or two that got killed 'fore I come back to Funeral six weeks ago. I guess this old place's ha'nted like most folks say. A murderin' ghost must walk here. I—"

He stopped, his eyes widening. A sound had swelled over the room. It was like a moan, like a groan. It came from everywhere, up from the old tiles covering the floor, out of the carved beams overhead, out of the very walls. It was like a dying man's moan, a sound that drove through Seldon from the top of his head to the ends of his toes and seemed to freeze him to the spot.

IN a moment the sound was gone, but in that moment the girl had stepped back beside Seldon. Unconsciously her right hand had come up, closing on his left forearm. He felt her fingers digging into his flesh. He felt her trembling. She seemed to be steeling herself for something, to be getting ready for an ordeal. When she spoke, her voice was calm. There was even a hint of laughter in it, but only sheer steel nerves were keeping it from trembling.

"I still say that it's nothing but the wind among the old tiles on the roof. Ghosts do not kill people," there was the faintest tremble in her voice. "Get this body out of here. Then come back and get the rug. You might take it now. It doesn't require all the men on Funeral Mountain to carry out a dead man and one rug. Take the rug to the slope below the pump. Wash this blood off of it. Well, what are you waiting for?"

She whirled upon them, stamping a spurred heel. Some of the men moved back from her as if expecting her to fly upon them. Another looked at the ceiling, at the floor, the walls. And now the strange noise came rushing back to the room

"We are close to the burying ground," the girl whispered. "Ming and all his men were murdered!"

It was like laughter now, like a quick, spasmodic outbreak of wicked chuckling and smacking. Mockery filled the entire room. It was like an explosion of harsh merriment, inhuman, frightfully unreal, a rasping, rattling noise that did not sound as if it came from any earthly thing.

"An' she calls it wind," Garrett half-whispered, an awed gleam in his eyes as the sound fell away and the room again became silent. "Wind in the tiles of the roof! If it is, then I'm a Dutchman's widow."

"I say it's the dead up an' walkin'," answered a tall, hatchet-faced old man with a round hole through his nostrils and the cartilage of his nose that looked as if it had been made by a bullet. "I say it's them chinks a-comin' back, stirrin' outa

their graves an' wailin' for what was done to 'em. Look at that brass dude of a thing in the corner!" He pointed a long, lean hand at the Buddha. "Look at that look on its face. He's allus kinda half-smirkin' ever' time yuh look at 'im. Damned if that smirk ain't just a little wider now. I'll swear it is! Hell, there's a smile all over that yaller brass face!"

"Odham! Gale!" The girl stamped her foot again. "Take this dead man out of here. *Now!* You're only wasting time standing here looking at the walls and the floor like sick crows. Move!"

"Yes, ma'am, just as yuh say." The two men came forward. They picked up the body of the man as two others turned to help them. "Out we go with what's left of Fate."

"But it ain't goin' to be the end of it." The man with the hole in his nose was still staring at the wall. "Whatever it is that's doin' this work will do some more, an' there ain't enough people on Funeral to stop it."

Seldon had not said a word. There was no need of it. He watched the men move aside the big table. He watched them roll up the heavy rug, struggle up with it, and stagger outside. With the room cleared of everybody except him and the girl, there was silence now. It was everywhere, vast and almost terrible. Phil Seldon could sense eyes watching him, eyes studying him from all over the room.

"Sorry, Mr. Seldon." The girl tried to smile as she spoke. "I forgot to tell you that we have a ghost here now and then, and the ghost seems to be the only one who can really laugh when a murder has been done."

Seldon did not answer. He had heard something. It was ever so faint, but he heard it, a mere whisper of the sound that had come only a few minutes before.

CHAPTER V

HOSSLER

ONCE the strange, unearthly noise had died away for the second time, there was no other sound. The room remained still. It was as if the ancient walls, the floor and ceiling had stirred just long enough to speak in a tongue no one in the room could understand, and then everything had quietly gone back to the past.

One after another, the men straggled out. Seldon and the girl were finally left to themselves. They stood there conversing in low tones until a one-eyed Mexican, wearing a white apron, came in, looking neither to right nor left. The man headed straight for the great fireplace in the south end of the room. He stooped, struck a match, and kindled a pine-knot fire, then turned like a ghost to light the ancient lamps.

Seldon was certain as he looked at the man that he had never seen a more villainous face on anything that even smacked of being human. The Mexican was short and fat, about fifty-five or sixty, as hairless as a lemon and toothless. Smallpox had pitted his old saddle-leather face with a thousand tiny craters of scars and pits that ran among a dozen others made by sharp weapons. He looked like something that had been whipped almost to death at some time, and the long marks of the whipping had been left there as a reminder of his past.

"Bullet-eye," whispered the girl as the man left the room. "We call him that. Don't say he looks like

the grandfather of the devil. He's a gentle soul. He never troubles anyone, and he is a wonderful cook. He was here when I was born, and he'll probably be here when I die."

"Judging by his looks," said Seldon, "I'd say you're not very optimistic, Miss Lord. He looks like a man with one foot already in the grave and the other slipping."

"And he is not that at all," she told him, leading the way to a high-backed couch at the left side of the fireplace and motioning for him to sit down beside her. "He is the strong man of Funeral Mountain. He can lift a horse—one as large as you were riding only a short time ago—and throw it free and clear, heels over across his shoulder. I have seen him do it. What I say is not mere speculation. Those short, thick arms have the strength of a gorilla. That stumpy, powerfully-knit body can move with the swiftness of a lightning flash. He came here practically dead with a bullet in his chest. According to Anvil and Gabriel Lord, he was dubbed with the name of Bullet-eye the day he came. The name remains. He does not resent it in the least, and if he has any other name, no one here has ever heard it. Be kind to him. He'll like it. He has the soul of a baby, and he will always return one kind act with a dozen. But come!" She stood suddenly. "I seem to forget everything today. I forget your wound, the blood you have lost, your soiled clothing. And worst of all, you must get to bed and rest. Forgive me. Bullet-eye will take you in hand. He'll brew a concoction for you that will work wonders in a few hours."

He tried to protest. He did not exactly know what to do here. Not yet had he seen a man who answered any even far-fetched description of any of the five men who had held up the Texas train. There had been a downright feeling of relief to that, and yet he knew that he had not seen all the men who were riding for this red butterfly of a girl.

She did not give him time to argue. She simply called Bullet-eye, and the man appeared, a ghost shadow as noiseless as before. The girl spoke to him hastily in Spanish, and he nodded. Not one hint of an expression, pleased, angered or otherwise, crossed his scarred face.

Bullet-eye simply took Seldon by the arm. Seldon tried to argue, but the thick, short hand on his arm gave it a grip that instantly silenced him. This one-eyed gorilla was no man to play with, no man to annoy by trying to be bullheaded about a thing, so Seldon walked away with him, through an arched doorway to the left of the brass Buddha in the corner.

THE room he was led into might have been in the heart of China. It was big, broad and cool, its walls all of four feet thick and made of logs thrown together and deep-plastered with stone and clay. A great bed stood in the far corner to the left. Another Buddha was in the corner to his right.

Bullet-eye insisted on doing everything. He ran water for a hot bath in a big, round tub made of clay and stone in a little room to the right, helped Seldon undress, and even lifted him into the tub. Twenty minutes later, with candles burning on a carved table in the center of the room, Seldon was in bed. A few minutes later he had downed a huge mug of something that was more like the juice of raw onions than anything else, and then Phil Seldon knew no more.

He slept like a dead man. He did not hear a sound, and he never opened his eyes until the night had passed and the sun was high in the sky. He sat up. Never in his life had he felt any better. He touched his shoulder. There was only a mere hint of soreness there, and he soon discovered that his wound had been dressed for the second time. Bullet-eye had probably done that, and yet Seldon had no recollection of it whatever.

"That hombre doped me," he muttered as he pushed his long legs and feet out of the bed and sat on the side of it. "Knocked me out with whatever that stuff was that he gave me. Sixteen horses could have run over me, there could have been an earthquake, and I wouldn't have known a darned thing about it. Well, so much for that."

His clothes had been washed and cleaned, and there they were hanging on the back of a chair. Besides cooking, that Bullet-eye was a man for everything, valet and doctor, and probably a rough-house bouncer when things were in demand for one. Sleep would not have been possible here without him. Not in a house where men were murdered by muttering and wailing ghosts.

There had been so much he had wanted to talk to the girl about. Now, confound it, he was going to dress, find her, and have a showdown. Hole-in-the-Head Hank Hossler and his crowd did not spell her only troubles here. There were others. Hossler and the girl might fight, and did, if a man could believe his own eyes and ears, but there was something else. The girl had not told him half of it. She had not lied about it. She had simply omitted a great deal, and the murdering ghost had been one of the worst things she could have omitted. He meant to get to the bottom of that.

It came to him that there was an awfully strange quiet throughout the house when he started dressing. A glance out the window showed him that everything was very still down toward the corrals and stables in the craterlike basin. The thought came to him that he had probably been left here alone with possibly no one around save for the scarred Bullet-eye. The girl and the men were possibly out on the range trying to round up a few herds that the Hossler crowd had not succeeded in running off in the hills.

The Hossler crowd was not a crowd of rustlers. The girl had told him that much. Neither Hole-in-the-Head Hank nor Fighting Father Frank, his father, were men who stooped to thievery. At least they had never been caught red-handed in the act. They were content merely to run the girl's cattle and horses away to hidden canyons and mysterious hills, and do anything else that would try to bring her to terms.

"As they hated Anvil and Gabriel Lord, they hate me." She had told him that, and from all he had seen, Seldon could believe it. "They stop anybody they can who even looks like he is heading my way. They thought you were coming here. They thought you were just another man on the run from the law."

He pulled on his boots slowly. The intense quiet was eating into him. He moved the table just to make a noise, thinking that it would attract somebody in the other part of the house. That it did was soon a certainty. He was just buckling on his heavy gun belts when a spurred heel sounded in the doorway behind him. He started to turn, but a cold, rasping voice halted him.

HOLD it, pardner! Stand where yuh stand! Keep yore hands on them belt buckles, an' we'll sorta trouble yuh for yore guns."

Seldon started to turn. He heard other spurred heels in the doorway now, and out of the corners of his eyes, he saw the form of a man glide noiselessly up to the window, a short, black-bearded gunman with a pair of heavy .45s cradled in his hands.

"Surrounded complete, mister," droned the voice behind Seldon. "We usually do things up in style when we start doin' 'em. I reckon the rustler wench in red mighta told yuh that. Ooze forward, Bill, an' strip the gent of his hardware. A little fella like him might get hurt by startin' to sorta play rough with the Hossler crowd, an' that'd kinda be just too bad for 'im."

Seldon turned in spite of the warning. He turned and looked straight into the lead-gray eyes of a six-foot-three, thin scarecrow with a shadow of gray beard on his cheeks and chin, wearing a great brown hat on the back of his head and two heavy six-shooters in his hand. At his side, just pushing forward, was a mere wisp of a man, a buck-toothed, red-eyed little whelp in black with his right hand holding a six-shooter and the left thrusting another back into its holster.

No introduction to the tall man was needed. The mere fact that Lorretta Lord had not described him did not matter in the least. Here was Hole-in-the-Head Hank Hossler. There was no question about it. The man's hat was clamped right on the back of his head, the brim of the hat flaring. His forehead was as bare as the palm of a hand. In it, above the left eye an inch down from the line of the hair, was a hole, a sunken red pocket with thin, membranous skin covering it like an eardrum, leaving a tiny opening in the exact center of it, a hole that had been made at some time by a bullet.

CHAPTER VI

THE GHOSTS RETURN

SELDON could only stand and stare at the man. Hank Hossler's black guns covered him. The gun in the right hand of the red-eyed, buck-toothed man was ready, a freckled forefinger curved on the trigger, the weapon already cocked. At the window there was that black-bearded gunman, no doubt a paid killer ready to kill at the first sign of a false move that would give him the excuse.

Seemingly out of nowhere, another man appeared from behind Hank Hossler. There was little doubt from the beginning that he was Fighting Father Frank Hossler. He was as tall and lean as the cold-eyed Hank, a man in black who might have been a preacher by his garb if it had not been for the bone-handled six-shooters at his hips. His eyes were as bright as blue glass, and he was very old. A snow-white mattress of long beard covered his face and hung in a cloud almost to his waistline. It seemed to cover everything, leaving only the wicked gleam of those blue eyes and a blood-red hawk-bill nose to show through the long hairs. He spoke, and his voice was like the unmusical splatter of brassy notes coming from a cracked bugle.

"Hold it, Hank! Stop it, Bill! Why bother to take a man's guns when he's all surrounded an' yuh got the drop on 'im? When yuh take a man's fightin' tools in a set-up like this, yuh leave no excuse to shoot 'im an' get 'im outa the way. He—"

He halted with a suddenly whis-

tling breath. His head had rocked backward, those icy-gleaming blue eyes bulging in their sockets, his long claws of hands flying to his throat. A twisting, kicking and writhing thing, he went down, a croaking bundle of jerking muscles and rank terror in the doorway.

"What'n hell is it, pa!" bellowed the snarling Hank, whirling as if he had suddenly forgotten Phil Seldon. "What . . . what's ailin' yuh? Here, lemme see. Damnation, what's that 'round his neck."

Even Seldon darted forward. It was a chance to go for his guns, but it would have been suicide. The burly black-beard at the window would have shot him down. As it happened, the room was suddenly so filled with confusion no one could think. Fighting Father Frank Hossler was still writhing there on the floor, still clawing at his old turtle-neck throat. One kick had thrown Hank back, and Fighting Father Frank seemed to have gone raving mad.

"There's something around his neck!" Seldon yelled that at the top of his voice. "Here, quick! Hold him! I see it! Throw him over on his stomach, damn it! We've got to work fast!"

Moving desperately, not yet knowing why he was trying to help this old devil who would not have hesitated to shoot him down only a few moments before, Seldon found the thing. It was buried deep in the wrinkled throat, a mere hair-line of a thing. It was like a wire, like a tiny ribbon of steel. It broke the skin of the old man's neck in several places, making the blood ooze when Seldon jerked it clear and the elder Hossler sat up gasping like a man who had been on the brink of death and was suddenly flung back from it.

"What'n hell is it?" demanded the startled Hank. "It looks like a black string to me."

"It is a string," nodded Seldon, standing up slowly. "A silk cord. It must have been thrown from somewhere. I thought I saw some movement behind the old man, something like a a hand. I was looking right at him."

"Yeah, it . . . it did come from . . . from behind," gasped old Fighting Father Frank. "It . . . it's one of the Oriental things. I . . . I've heard about 'em. Damn it"—he stumbled to his feet, a man with all the fighting starch taken out of him now—"I've allus heard that this joint was ha'nted. I don't believe in them damned ha'nts, but there's something haywire as hell round here. I—"

A sound cut him off. Seldon recognized it instantly. It was the sound he had heard after he had seen the dead man lying on the rug at the end of the table in the huge living room. Now it came from everywhere, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, an evil chuckling that came from all over the old house, a sound of mocking laughter that might have been the subdued braying of an ass.

"Damn it, it's ha'nts!" Fighting Father Frank's terror was still upon him. To Seldon's amazement, he saw the old man whirl, saw him holding his hands above his head and rushing away, out through the living room, through the front door, and on until he cleared the broad old veranda.

"Don't leave this dude, Bill!" bawled the snarling Hank, and suddenly he was going, following his father. "We . . . we've got the whole house surrounded. We . . . we'll find out what . . . what this is!"

"Get goin', fella, an' follow 'em!"

Seldon felt the muzzle of one of the buck-toothed man's guns suddenly jam itself hard against the ribs of his left side. "Follow 'em to hell outa here! Quick! We ain't stayin' in here with that damn racket goin' on an' strings to kill folks comin' outa the thin air! Hurry, I tell yuh!"

But the sound came back, more terrible, more awful than before. Now the entire house and its foundation seemed to shake and vibrate as if an earthquake was trembling far beneath the ancient floors and walls.

The noise was longer this time. Suddenly it was right under Seldon's and the buck-toothed man's feet. It was there for a second, then, like an echo, it was sweeping on, rocking from wall to wall, floor to ceiling, one room to another, then all over the house at the same time. Like the braying of an ass, it came back under Seldon's and the little man's feet, rising up through the very soles of their boots and appearing to climb in an icy chill through their knees and legs until it was around their hips.

IT was too much for the buck-toothed man. With a wild yell, he whirled away from Seldon. In a mad dash, he headed out through the living room. As he turned toward the door, the rug slipped under his feet, throwing him sprawling, a fierce yell of terror coming from him as if the panicky notion had come to him that he had been seized and thrown by unseen hands.

Something moved Seldon just in time. He leaped to one side as the black-bearded gunman roared a shot at him through the window. The bullet smashed into the old plaster above Seldon's head, glanced, struck the ceiling, and brought down a showering cloud of white.

The gunman fired again, as if shooting at Seldon's shadow, and now Seldon let him have it. He sent two bullets smashing through the window. There was a snarl of pain that became a sickening wail, a noise of booted and spurred feet stumbling backward on the veranda with hurried confusion, and then the voice of somebody bawling orders at the top of a pair of leather lungs.

"Easy, Blackie!" boomed the voice. "Damn it, there's somethin' wrong in there! There's somethin' that ain't human in that damn house. I don't think the duck in there knows what it is."

As if answering him, the unknown laugh sounded again. It chuckled, it rumbled. It grew frightfully sharp. It was as if a dozen ghosts were wailing, sighing and filling the house with their mocking laughter. And in the corner of the living room the brass Buddha sat and placidly smiled as if he alone knew the secret, as if he was the god and master of the mystery, the All-Knowing, All-Wise, All-Seeing; a brass idol sitting and dreaming of other days, of other men who people these great rooms and bowed with deep humility before his shrine; a brass idol who dreamed of wars that had been waged, the blood that had been shed —and possibly of blood that would yet be shed.

CHAPTER VII

THE HIDDEN PASSAGE SPEAKS

BOTH Hole-in-the-Head Hank Hossler and old Fighting Father Frank admitted to themselves that they were acting like a pair of scared young fools who were not yet dry behind the ears. Funeral Mountain had always had its own

way of awing them. There was something so confounded unreal about it, something so outlandishly ghostly in those hellish gods sitting about on the slopes.

But they wanted Funeral Mountain. They had always wanted it, since the very day the two-gunned Fighting Father Frank had come pushing in from the south with his own big Texas trail herd and his own gang of ruffians. Anvil Lord had left him alone as long as he was content to keep his outfits west of Thunderbird Divide, but once he had tried to thrust his way into the great valley just west of Rampart Ridge, hellfire and damnation had broken loose.

Blood flowed. Guns of war lighted the hills. Great herds of Fighting Father Frank's Bar Star Bar cattle had disappeared. Some said that Anvil Lord had stolen them bodily. Some said that he had only trailed them far back into the wild hills and left them where they would never be found again. Whatever it was, Fighting Father Frank had lost his shirt several times, and several times there had been a truce. But no truce had lasted long. Hank Hossler had grown to fighting age. Gabriel Lord had come along, kinder than his father, more easygoing, a man who would listen to some reason as long as he lived.

But the wars had raged on. Once Anvil Lord was dead, Fighting Father Frank had come across Thunderbird Divide, shedding blood all the way, a warring devil driving on until he reached the great valley west of Rampart, and there he had held on through blood and periods of peace. And he had fought fire with fire.

He had backed rustlers preying on the Lord herds, and he had backed them many times. When Gabriel Lord was dead, the taking of Funeral Mountain had looked like a simple matter, but Gabriel Lord had left another fighting Lord behind, one who could wage war with any man—a girl who could hold her own through thick and thin.

This morning's thrust was the blow that should have swept the Bar Star Bar into the saddle of an all-crowning victory, one that would have made Fighting Father Frank and Hole-in-the-Head Hank absolute kings of the hills. For weeks every Bar Star Bar rider had been studying the Funeral Mountain riders.

Just enough war had been waged to hold down suspicion. For ninety days it had been like that, a mere little spat here, another there. Lorretta Lord's men had gradually dwindled away, and in the meanwhile more and more riders had straggled into the valley west of Rampart Ridge. A few wise ones had been sent on to join the Funeral Mountain men until the day came when five men had ridden into the valley with their leader, a tall, handsome blackguard who called himself Gold-tooth Charley Sunday, a hardened, cold-blooded killer if Fighting Father Frank had ever looked one in the eye. And the four men with Gold-tooth Charley had been no better. Each was a gunman. All were dressed in cowpuncher fashion, and none of them had seemed to know a cow from a bull.

SOMETHING fiendishly desperate lay behind those men. It had something to do with murder and robbery. Hank Hossler had learned that much while eavesdropping on them one dark night from below a bunkhouse window, but neither he nor old Fighting Fa-

ther Frank had felt that it was up to them to pry into the secret. Those men wanted a place to stay, a place to hide out until hot trails behind them became cool enough for a man to ride again. If Lorretta Lord—and the two Lords before her—could use wanted men, then so could the Bar Star Bar, just as the Bar Star Bar had used them so often in the past.

"Men on the run an' hidin' out will work for yuh for nothin'," had been old Fighting Father Frank's chuckling comment. "Forget what yuh heard, Hank. We'll just keep it back inside our skulls, usin' it as a joker up our sleeve to keep 'em in line by droppin' a hint that sounds like we know a heap more'n we really do know. It'll keep 'em from runnin' out on us if times get tough."

And times were tough right now. Long before daylight had come etching its grayness across the hills, the Bar Star Bar had been on the move. Horses had been left three miles away. Men afoot had come creeping through the shadows. Every guard of the Funeral Mountain gang's outposts had been marked. Bar Star Bar riders had taken great pains to slip past them. They had avoided the trails up the side of the peak. One after the other they had quietly slipped to their places. A sulking shadow here and there, a dozen of them in all, they had waited for daylight, then sunup, and then midmorning.

The quiet had been terrible in its suspense. Nothing save the horses down in the corrals had stirred. Not a shadow had appeared from the old house or the other outbuildings down in the crater. The Hosslers had expected a trap. They were almost certain of it. They had waited and waited until the strain could be stood no longer, and then they had come closing in to find the house entirely deserted. Beds had been slept in. Unwashed dishes were in the baked stone and clay sink in the kitchen. Not another sign of life had been evident until that one man in the back bedroom had stirred.

Now the damned ghosts had run everybody out of there. Old Fighting Father Frank was sick and disgusted with it. At the same time he could not help those chills of fear that kept stealing over him and racing like icy water down his back. This thing was not real. There was something as haywire as all get-out here. Not one of his trusted men could he see, not one of the three he had sent to join up with the Funeral Mountain riders.

"Somethin's happened to this layout," he growled finally, now standing behind a pile of tall rocks and staring at the house. "I'm shore that they're all here. That fightin' red gal didn't run out. I looked in a closet in one of the bedrooms. It was chock full of all kinds of fancy gal clothes, an' gals don't run out of a place an' leave all their purty duds behind."

Chuck Riley, the black-bearded man who had been at the window of the north bedroom, was the only one who had received real harm so far. Fighting Father Frank could still feel the ache of that silken cord that had been around his neck, but he was not cursing and raving about it as Riley was raving about his wound. A bullet from one of the guns of the lone man left in the house had shattered Riley's left arm at the elbow. Two Bar Star Bar riders were trying to put his arm in a rude splint and were working on him over under a shelf of rock on the slope below the pump and the old well that Hossler had heard men say was more than five hundred feet deep.

Suddenly the trapdoor dropped and the Bar Star Bar riders were plunging toward death.

"We can't just stand out here, pa!" There was something akin to a whine in Hole-in-the-Head Hank Hossler's tone. "We've come this far, an' Bill run out like a damned fool, leavin' the only man on the place what looks like he could fight. We've got to take this spread over."

"An' who's goin' to lead the way?" demanded the little buck-toothed man. "I ain't scared of any cock-eyed thing I can see to fight, but—but there's things in that damn house nobody can see. It ain't human. It ain't—"

A wild yell from inside the house and a shot cut him off. There was the sound of a short, fierce struggle, another bellow of an angry voice, the sound of another shot, and then the noise of something falling against chairs and tables. Laughter came after that, a wild bellowing, and then everything inside the house was suddenly still.

"Rush the house, boys!" bellowed Fighting Father Frank. "Shoot down ever'thing yuh see! Stop at nothin' what moves! Let's go! In a bunch. *Rush it!*"

They came now from all sides, booted feet thumping, spurred heels crashing on the old veranda all around. From every side they poured in, guns out and cocked, fingers curled on the triggers, every pair of eyes the eyes of a killer hawk swooping to action.

THE empty house mocked them. It was thoroughly and absolutely empty. The man who had shot Chuck Riley had disappeared as if the floors had opened and swallowed him. Only the rushing of the crowd of Bar Star Bar men broke the fearful grip of silence. Boot heels thumped, spurs crashed on the old tile floors. From room to room the mob rushed, and it was all the same. The men kept on darting about, the muzzles of their guns poking here and there, into this closet,

into this voiceless room. At the end of five minutes, the entire crowd found itself mobbed together in the great living room with every pair of eyes studying another with fearful questions in their depths.

Gold-tooth Charley Sunday was there, garbed in black, and the most handsome one in the lot. At his heels were the four men one could always find at his back. They were bearded, narrow-eyed, each a gunman and a handy man with a knife. Sunday was the first to find his voice, and in spite of his handsomeness, the voice was a croak.

"Damn it all, this business is giving me the shakes, men!" His dark face was suddenly mottled with sickly yellow blotches. "We're in a hell of a mess of mystery here. We should set fire to the whole hellish works, and then get back in the clear and watch it all go up in smoke and flames!"

"I agree with yuh, Charley!" put in another man. "This thing ain't never been nothin' but a hell hole of trouble. Blood an' more blood, an' mystery runnin' neck an' neck with it. I say fire it. Let it burn to the ground!"

A mocking laugh answered him. It came from the great dining room. There was not the least doubt about it. It roared out in one fierce shriek, and there was the sound of running feet.

"Catch 'im!" bawled old Fighting Father Frank, darting forward with his guns filling his hands. "Hurry, boys!"

They literally dived into the dining room. In a body they jammed through the door. In the end of the room they saw an old cupboard moving in the corner. Beyond it was a vault of darkness, a passageway running along through the center of one of the thick walls. Fighting Father Frank fired at what looked like the flame of a bobbing candle racing away from him. Then he was at the cupboard, and he was just in time to keep it from closing. He sent it smashing back, and dived into the opening with his guns roaring at the bobbing figure of a man that suddently went down ahead of him.

"I got 'im, boys!" The old man's voice was a wail. "Come on! He's down! I hit 'im plumb center!"

He rushed on, the others following. The figure was lying there ahead of him, the candle still burning. Fighting Father Frank plunged on, and came to a halt with a crash of his spurred heels just as the candle flame went out.

"Strike a match!" thundered the old man. "It's dark as hell in this hole, but we've got ourselves a man. We . . . we . . . well, I'll be damned!" He yelped that as matches flared. "It . . . it's only a straw dummy! Straw packed in men's clothes! We—"

A weird laugh answered him, one that shook the passage, that came rocketing up from underfoot, an eerie, wailing burst of sound that drove cold chills through every one of them.

"We . . . we're trapped!" Gold-tooth Charley Sunday yelled that. "Look! That cupboard thing's gone shut behind us! We . . . we're as good as dead an' gone to hell in this hole, men!"

"Yes, as good as dead and gone to hell where white mongrel dogs of hate and greed belong!" The voice that answered was ghastly. It seemed to come from everywhere in the darkness. Every word of it was one that mocked them for the fools they were. "Our honorable dead have long awaited the hands to avenge their cowardly murders, and

you are as good as dead. For once the white man's tongue has spoken with truth and the wisdom of understanding. May your souls rest in your burning pits of fire and brimstone, and may the spirit of the Honorable Ming haunt you through all eternity."

There was silence after that. They waited like men doomed, with beads of perspiration oozing out on their foreheads. They stirred then. They yelled, they shouted, they sent their curses raging up and down the passage. Now they charged the cupboard, and found themselves face to face with a wall of steel.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH SCREAMS THROUGH DARKNESS

FOR thirty minutes after the short, fierce battle in front of the Buddha in the living room, Phil Seldon did not know where he was or what had happened to him. He awoke at last, conscious that his head was resting on some one's lap, and that his face was being bathed in cold water.

It came back to him then that he had been jumped upon from behind.

Two giants of some Oriental race had set upon him. He remembered that as he whirled he had seen the Buddha moved out from the corner, leaving a black gaping hole in the wall behind it, and then he had been trying to fight. One of his guns had leaped from its holster into his hand. Another powerful hand had closed on his wrist. He had let out a wild yell of surprise. The gun in his hand had gone off. He could not remember whether he had fired once, twice or three or four times. A sangbag had slapped him down across the head two or three times, and the rest had been darkness and silence.

Now he stirred, with the light of ancient brass lamps glowing in his face. He looked up, and saw Lorretta Lord's face staring at him. Then, with the girl helping him, he sat up beside her with her hand on his arm to steady him. His head seemed to be whirling like a spinning top. Nausea gripped him at the pit of his stomach. He felt as if he was going to faint until the girl held an old jar of icy water to his lips and he downed several big gulps of it.

"And, fortunately," he heard her speaking, "this doesn't contain some drug to make sleeping logs of us again."

"What . . . what happened?" He got that out, and tried to grin at her from one side of his numb mouth. "You were gone—"

"And so was everybody else when you awoke, yes." She smiled at him wearily. "I remember throwing myself across my bed to rest for a few minutes before supper. Bullet-eye says he tried to awaken me, but I seemed so tired he left me to sleep. I had not undressed, and I suppose I am lucky for that. I at least have all my clothes."

"Then . . . then you were doped?"

"Along with everybody else, yes!" she nodded. "It was in the water in the pails in the kitchen. You had some of it in the concoction Bullet-eye made for you. I had a drink of it on an empty stomach. The rest had their share with their supper. Some remember things up until eight o'clock. Bullet-eye doesn't know when he went to sleep. It looks like Funeral Mountain has gone back to the yellow men, to the descendants of the honorable Sin Song Ming. You will know more about it later. In the meanwhile, we await the pleasure of the six men who have made us prisoners."

He stared around the place. They

were in some underground room. To his right was a stone-arched opening in the rocks. A door of wrought iron woven into a lattice filled it. There were other arches, but stone and mortar filled all of them except one off in the shadows to his left. From that opening came a hazy glow of light, and—finally—the moving shadows of men could be seen through the archway.

"We seem to have all manner of room down here." The girl was talking again. "Every Funeral Mountain rider is here, even to the men I always post on guard every night. Our yellow friends did not leave a thing undone. They were very thorough."

"And it was them, I suppose," he ventured, "that made all the devilish noise we heard under our feet and all around the rooms."

"Yes, even that has been explained," the girl said. "A system of copper tubes runs everywhere. Like a speaking tube system in some hotels. The upper mouths were concealed, of course. Master Ming must have thought of everything. Wait!"

She placed her hand on his arm to halt any speech that might come from him, for footsteps had faintly sounded beyond the wrought iron door. They came closer, the bobbing light of an old lantern glowing ahead of them. Low voices followed, and then two men appeared at the iron door. One of them took a bundle of keys from a great sleeve of his flowing blue robe, and a key grated in the lock.

PHIL SELDON had never seen a larger and a more handsome Chinaman than the one who came forward when the door was opened. The second man was left on guard, a sullen Oriental with a big six-shooter gripped in his right hand.

The man who came forward with his right hand gripping the ivory hilt of a long knife in his leather belt was more than six feet tall. He was broad-shouldered and deep-chested, an arrogant, high-headed yellow-faced god of a man with golden-yellow eyes, a curving eagle beak of a nose, and a thin-lipped, straight-lined mouth. He halted eight feet away and spoke without a trace of an accent.

"And by now, fair one, I presume you have told this man why he is here and what he may expect?"

"I have told him very little," answered the girl steadily. "I left those details to you—especially your very ghastly descriptions. You may tell him about them. He appears to be a man who can take things on the chin without whimpering."

"And you, my fair one," answered the giant with a proud curl of his lips, "seem to be a wild young mare of the same strong blood. He will know soon enough. We are the men of Ming, the sons of our fathers. We come from across the sea with documents of old at last in our possession to lead us to every secret passage in these long dead workings. Documents that lead to gold the white men overlooked in their blood-spilling and murdering of people who only asked to be left alone. Death made our wrongs. Death will right them.

"Your enemies are upstairs." He smiled faintly. "In a secret passage where they were led like fools madly following a simple decoy. Even now they are up there struggling for breath, for the passage has neither air nor light. Soon, if I leave them there, there will be no breath left for them. That reward for them

would be too simple. We of the Orient do not believe in simple death. To us death must have its thrills. We love to hear the moaning of the dying. We like to see the eyes of our enemies bulging with pain as they expire.

"As I say"—he was walking backward slowly and had already gained the heavy iron door—"we place thrills in death to take away the simple stupidity of the mere dying. Will you permit me to illustrate my point?"

He was beyond the door now. He pulled it closed. A great old key rattled. An old lock clacked harshly as if annoyed at being disturbed. Outside, the giant clapped his hands, making a sound that might have come from boards suddenly popping themselves together. A resounding yell answered, coming out of the blackness of the underground room's high ceiling. Then, in a noisy, shrieking, wailing and screaming flood, men were falling through fifty feet of bitter darkness to become heaps of broken bones.

CHAPTER IX

GOLD AND LOVE

IT was the most horrible thing anyone could have witnessed. The old planks of a floor high above had suddenly become a long trapdoor, dropping from under the feet of the men in that dark passage up there. Into black-ink darkness with only a haze of light showing far below, the Bar Star Bar riders had plunged, even to the one with his arm in a splint. Spinning cartwheels in the air, they were, death-bound men hurling through space to a pile of stones in the center of the underground room.

Like smacking and splashing canvas pails of water, they started landing, the bodies of terror-yelling men at one instant, hopelessly broken shapes at the next, a moan of death here, a wail of the dying there—death splashing blood all over the room.

"And the words of the old documents are being carried out," intoned the voice of the giant Chinaman, now going on away beyond the iron door as if his work was done. "It was written that quick death would be for some, and a death of slow starvation for the others, the ones found in possession of the temple. May the sins of your forefathers rest like millstones on your souls."

The two Chinamen were gone then, gone as if never to return; gone to leave Seldon and the others there, to die and rot, to spend their last breaths thinking of all the things that had gone on in the past.

"And none of which we are to be blamed for," murmured Lorretta Lord as if thinking aloud. "Oh, Phil, this is terrible—terrible!"

PHIL found the broad money belts a short time after everything had grown infernally still and they were straightening out the bodies of the dead. The horribly distorted face of one of the men seemed familiar. He looked at the face more closely, at the shape of the gold teeth in the mouth, and then searched the body. The belt was there, buckled against the naked skin. He slid it out from the bloody clothing, and thinking of nothing else for the moment, he unfastened the snap buttons of the belt. Sheafs of gold bonds stared up at him in the lamplight. Then he was forced to explain who he was to the girl and the others.

"An' yo're the law, atter all, huh?" one of the girl's riders spoke to him

in a grinding voice. "Ridin' in on us—"

"Looking for train robbers and government bonds, yes!" Seldon nodded grimly. "Not for anything else, and not asking questions about anything else. My men are here, delivered on a bloody platter, you might say. Our job is to try to get out of here, not to stand and argue. Who you are or what you are doesn't concern me. In fact, I believe I'm through with the United States postal service when I'm through with this case."

It did not satisfy them at first. Even the girl looked at him for a long time as if she had lost all faith in men, but they helped him place five of the men side by side against the wall, and then they straightened out the mangled shapes of the others.

"At least we've got fightin' tools," growled one of the men as they all helped themselves to six-shooters and belts of cartridges from the dead men. "But that don't look so good on the face of it. Them chinks aren't comin' back, else they wouldn't have allowed these guns in here. They're gone, an' they know we will be dead in due time."

"Guard that door over there," warned Seldon, helping himself to a fine pair of six-shooters from the holsters of the gold-toothed body and passing the girl another pair from a short, black-bearded man's belts. "They're liable to return in spite of what we think."

He had seen something. The falling bodies had dislodged several big stones from the high-piled mass. He started moving other stones aside, and the rest of the men came forward to help him without knowing exactly what he was going to do.

In a few minutes they had discovered the thing Seldon had seen. It was a bolted slab of wide, thick planks, and as more and more stones were moved it became a door of some kind, one that the innocent-looking pile of stones had completely covered. Here was something even the giant Chinaman evidently had overlooked in those documents he had mentioned. For soon Seldon could see wrought iron hinges, and then a ring of iron.

"Hanged it if ain't a trapdoor of some kind," grunted one of the men. "Maybe not really a trapdoor, but it's a door, one what'll open by pullin' up on it. Listen!"

A noise had stirred far overhead. The girl was holding one of the ancient brass lamps. At a nod from Seldon she moved back hastily, throwing the rocks in darkness while Seldon stared upward, a gun in either hand, and ready to fire at anything that moved overhead.

But nothing happened, the yellow men evidently believing there was no possible avenue for their prisoners to make trouble, and keeping the light subdued, Seldon moved back to the work, rolling away stone after blood-smeared stone until the planked door was bare.

When one of the men lifted it, rusty hinges wailed mournfully and the noise of spilling water came from far below. A flash of one of the lamps showed rough stone steps leading downward. Seldom was soon on them, carrying one of the lamps. Lorretta followed at his heels while the others waited behind to close the door.

The steps led down for thirty feet, and came to an end with a swing to the right on a broad ledge overlooking a black abyss. Seldon made the turn. He passed an old chute of heavy planks that had been used as a dumping place for unwanted rock in the past, and mounted another short flight of steps that rounded an

abrupt bend in the rocks that hid them from view. He stepped out into a low cavern. As he lifted the lantern a little higher he heard the girl gasp behind him.

"Master Ming," Seldon whispered, "evidently was not all love and roses by the looks of this. Look! At least thirty of them—and you can bet they were all white men!"

THEY stood along the rough wall, a long line of them in rusty chains, some of them broken and fallen apart, others held together still by rotting bags of clothing. Skeletons they were, grinning white imps in the lamplight, some with fleshless mouths gaped open, some with mouths tightly closed, all of them chalk-white.

"A room of horror and death!" whispered the girl. "Men chained against that wall and left there to die! And I thought Ming was a gentle, peace-loving soul. What is it they all seem to be staring at? What is that boxlike thing, Phil?"

"A bin!" Seldon's voice was surprised as he moved to it and ran his hand over piles of gleaming metal. "Full of gold nuggets, the thing white men were always seeking in the old days here! Gold, Lorretta. The thing men fight and die for all over the world. And here they stood starving and dying with the accursed stuff always staring at them. What a monster your Master Ming must have been after all! A merciless, cunning old spider who must have looked upon all whites as flies for his net. There are tons of this infernal metal! You're a rich girl, Lorretta!"

"As if it matters, even if we get out of here, Phil." There was a strange huskiness in the girl's tone. He sat the lamp on the edge of the old bin and turned to look at her. "As if all the gold in the world could matter now. You are the law. You came for a purpose. It is ended. Soon you will go away." She laughed softly but mirthlessly, and he thought he saw something like tears start in her eyes. "Don't think me too silly. We—we Lords have always gone straight to the point. We are a fighting people."

"But . . . but I don't understand!"

"Of course not!" She shook her head violently. "But . . . but can't you see? All things here were lonely until you came. Oh, Phil, I've got to get it out or die!"

Suddenly she was against him, and her arms were up and around him, her bosom against his chest, a wild trembling shaking her whole body. And just as quickly his arms, swift and sure went around her. The Mings and danger were far, far away when his lips found hers.

"Lorretta"—his voice was hoarse—"I'll go, it's true. I'll go with five outlaws loaded on horses and this million in bonds in my bosom. To the nearest town I'll take my charges. There I'll turn them over. My job is through. I want no more of it. I want you, to come back here with you, to stay here—"

"And now that you have come," she whispered fiercely, "I'll never let you out of my sight again, Philip Seldon! I am going with you, and I'll bring you back with me!"

CHAPTER X

THE LAST OF THE MINGS

IT was a long time before they moved on. Time meant little to them now. Danger meant less. Phil marched along ahead, while Lorretta followed, carrying the lamp.

They came to a bare wall at the end of the long room. In time he found a door, opened it, and stepped into another room where another bin of gold lined one wall and skeletons of Ming's victims the other. After that it was one room after another until they pushed against old planks and came into the mine itself.

Here were picks and shovels. Here was gold and more gold until it became almost sickening. Here were picks and shovels where men had dropped them to dash up through the temple and fight, to meet howling whites and die. And then, suddenly from nowhere, came the mumble of voices. Seldon stepped back beside the girl, ready to dash the light from her hands while he strained his ears to listen to the murmuring voices.

"It comes through there," he whispered finally, pointing to rusty strips and bars of iron spread in a network across a square mass of stones. "Let's take it easy, honey."

A minute's work, and the stones were swinging inward. Here now was a passage off to the left. They followed it. The voices grew louder, and became the voices of white men quarreling among themselves over their plight. Then they passed a wrought-iron door, and saw that it was the prison where the wholesale murder of the Bar Star Bar men had taken place. Some of the Funeral Mountain riders came to the door as Seldon and the girl passed it. Seldon whispered a word of warning, and they moved on.

Soon they were at another flight of stone stairs. Now the way was clear. The steps wound upward, through natural caverns and through rooms hewn out of solid rock. Voices came again, this time ahead. They grew into a wild argument, but it was in Chinese and Seldon could not understand it.

The end came when they reached a musty passageway and followed the tracks of feet in the dusty floor until they stopped before another wall of planks. Now the voices were dead ahead and close at hand. Phil Seldon unholstered his guns, and motioned for the girl to move back as he found a secret latch.

I AM the spokesman here!" thundered a voice, for some reason speaking excitedly in English. "We are the last of the Mings. We will do as the documents say! Die as the documents say, they will!" Then, as if recovering itself, the voice switched back into a rapid flow of Chinese, and Seldon could understand no more of it.

Guns ready, satisfied that all six of the Orientals were in front of him, he reached up. The latch moved noiselessly, and he gave the planks in front of him a violent push. They swung outward with a crazy rattling and smashing of dishware on shelves, and the temple's dining room was there before him.

Death roared now. There was no quarter here. Into the leaping and snarling forms of six men, Phil Seldon's guns flung their licking, piercing flame. Chairs crashed. Men bawled with the terror of death upon them, their hands flying to weapons beneath their coats and robes, their startled wailing a din rising above the sounds of the shots.

The giant Chinaman was the first to go down. With his hands loaded with a gun in each balled fist, he buck-jumped backward from the table. One gun roared at Seldon, smashing a bullet in the wall above the white man's head. The yellow man was doubling forward then, a

round, black hole appearing in his forehead that instantly gushed blood.

A second man went down, caught with a bullet between the shoulder blades before he could spin around with his hands filled with guns. The third got it straight between the eyes as he was back-jumping toward an open door to the veranda. The fourth and fifth managed to get started shooting, but Seldon killed them with bullets blazing from guns in both hands—bullets that seemed to snatch the two men together and send them sliding in that fashion to the floor.

The last man almost made good his escape. He reached the doorway to the veranda, whirled, flipped a quick shot at the fighting figure there in the opening in the wall, and then spun around on his heel with a bullet hole drilled through his temple.

Nothing was very clear for a while after that. Nothing was certain but the dead man on the floor, the acrid bite of thick gun smoke clouding the room, the smell of blood, and a girl rushing forward to throw her arms around Phil Seldon. Wild sobs came afterward.

For once Phil Seldon was seeing Lorretta Lord break. She was all woman now—his woman. Soon they would take the keys from the belt of the giant and go below to release the others, but just now time did not mean aything. Only a girl mattered, and she was in his arms. Even the dead Mings on the floor seemed far, far away.

THE END

WILD BURROS FACE EXTINCTION

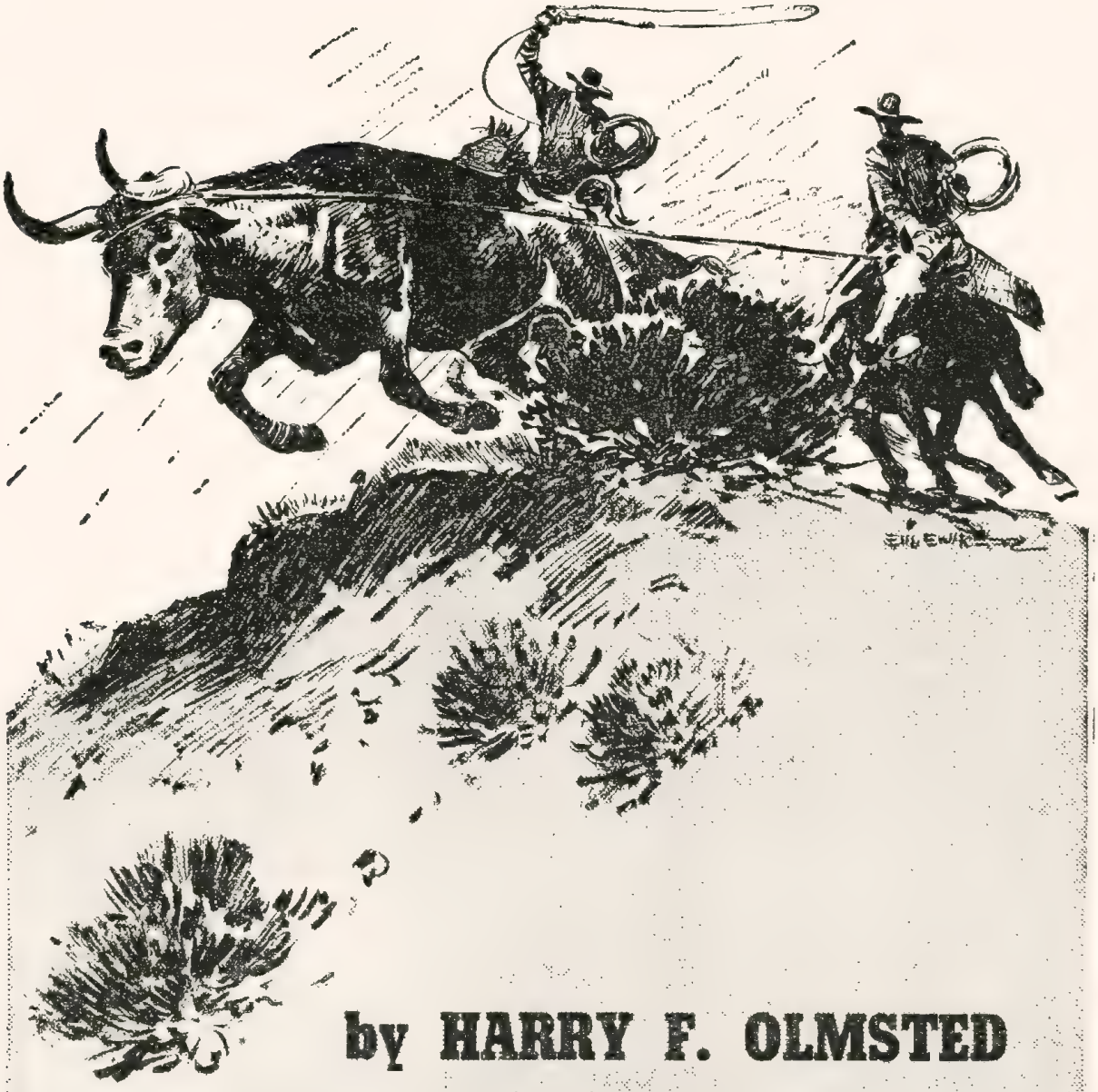
TECHNICALLY, there is no such thing as a "wild" burro on the American continent any more than there are real "wild" horses. The scientific sharps insist that a wild animal must not only be roaming free, but all of his ancestors must have been wild, too. Our horses and burros are "feral," the free-roaming descendants of domestic animals.

The burros of the Panamint Mountains bordering on Death Valley in California are just as wild as bighorn sheep and desert deer. They roam in bands of from half a dozen to several score, living on soapweed, false sage, smoke grass and other sparse vegetation where any other large animal would starve to death. And they add a lot to the picturesque desert scene —viewed through a pair of binoculars. You can't get anywhere close to them.

But because they are the descendants of pack animals that escaped from Death Valley prospectors and pack trains fifty to eighty years ago and took to the free life of the desert sinks, they are not protected by any State or Federal law. So now they are being exterminated by so-called hunters who have been fencing off the desert waterholes so they can get close to the thirst-crazed creatures and shoot them down without any attempt at marksmanship. The carcasses are chopped up and sold for chicken feed.

Fortunately, the wrath of several wild-life societies has been aroused and efforts are being made to stop the slaughter.

SMOKY JUDGMENT DAY



by HARRY F. OLMSTED

Smoky Judgment Day

A BITING October wind seemed almost to blow the solitary horseman through the leaning gate of the T Down spread, that bleak evening. The lithe, slender girl, beating out the rhythmical supper call on a triangle at the cookshack door, paused in midstroke to regard the stranger, noting the ease with which he controlled his fine horse, when the beast would have shied at a bounding tumbleweed. She noted also how the oncoming night seemed to settle about his gaunt, leathery face, making it darker.

Four cowhands came piling out of the bunkhouse in answer to the welcome summons, halting abruptly, watchful and patently suspicious as the stranger came on. They saw a man spare to a point of cadaverousness, a man whose great height and whang-leather toughness was immediately apparent as he swung down to study them with a silent, searching scrutiny, like a lobo wolf keening the air for danger before taking the next step. He seemed to awe them into a state of complete wordlessness and, when he spoke, it was like the slash of a quirt against bullhide chaps.

"Tom Thatcher—I'm looking for him," he ripped out.

Ron Allison, the ramrod of the T Down, stood forth a few steps, his young face devoid of its usual friendliness. "Looking for Tom? Such as how, stranger?"

The angular man stood still, his lids drawing up so as to afford them a full view of the peculiarly arctic green of his deep-sunk eyes. A chill expression, meant for a grin, spread outward from his flaring nostrils, fixing thin lips and weathered cheeks in a frozen, humorless expression.

"You boys are careful, but I won't lose you nothin'. I mean old Tom no harm. I've rode a long way to see him."

"He ain't here," said Allison. "You can't see him."

"No?" The stranger's chuckle was taunting. "The man don't live that can stop me, if I locate him. Where is he at?"

The girl, her face robbed of its color and her hands held at her breast, stepped forward. With the rowdy wind blowing her brown hair and molding her gingham dress to her lithe figure she was a picture to stir the pulse of any man. But the stranger, cold and unmoved, waited for her to speak, his lank hands hanging by his gun belt.

"Tom Thatcher is in the hospital in Aspen City," she said.

"Hospital?" The lines of the stranger's sharp face altered swiftly. "Sick?"

"Paralyzed." Her lips tightened. "Bullet in the spine."

The stranger's right hand seemed to snap to his gun. "Who shot him?"

She shook her head wearily. "We don't know. It came from the brush."

The gaunt head nodded. "Bushwhacker, eh? Tom getting well?"

Emotion twisted the girl's face. "No. They say he'll never walk again unless we—" she seemed unable to continue.

"Unless what?"

"Unless we get him to a specialist."

"Humph." The stranger stroked his jaw. "Bed bound for life, eh? Who are you?"

"Jean Thatcher, his daughter."

"Daughter?" Surprise touched the thin face. "Didn't know he had a family. I'm Carse Corbus."

"Corbus," repeated the girl. "I don't remember hearing dad speak of you."

"He wouldn't," the man said with a grim smile.

"Supper," said Jean, "is getting cold. Let's go in and eat."

INSIDE the cook shack, the lamplight seemed to emphasize a certain covert deadliness about this grim man. He clawed off his weather-stained hat, waiting until the crew was seated—Smoky Shane and Hondo Grimes, two saddle-warped oldsters; Skeeter Ott, a button; and Ron Allison. Not until then did Corbus sit, and then with his chair screwed to the left for freer action of his right hand, a gesture patently more habitual than menacing.

It was a silent meal and soon over. None of the usual easy camaraderie of the cow-country cookshack lightened the air of gloom about the table. The men ate with their faces lowered, wolfing food and occasionally grunting some monosyllable that echoed starkly against the walls.

Corbus was first to shove back his plate. As his long, thin fingers fashioned a cigarette, he let his eyes touch the girl.

"Why don't Tom see this specialist?" he asked.

"No money," she said miserably. "It will take so much and—"

"What's the matter with your outfit?" he cut in.

A sullen mutter ran through the cowhands. "War," the girl answered. "It goes back to the day when Colt Garton tried to buy us out for a song—to get our Cave Creek water. When dad refused his price, he promised he'd make us glad to walk out and let him have it, for nothing. He's about done that."

"Such as how?" Corbus' eyes were glittering.

"Our cattle have been driven off the flats and Garton has refused to let us cut his herds. When we tried a roundup, our men were shot at. Garton killed our credit at the Aspen City bank and the men got tired of risking bullets without pay. These boys are all we have, and they haven't been paid for three months."

Carse Corbus turned his eyes to the cowhands, each in his turn. "Why did you hairpins stick, with the cards all stacked against you?"

Ron Allison rose to the taunt, climbing to his feet, red-faced. "What's that to you?" he rasped. "What kind of a man would run away and leave a lone girl in a split stick? Put it this way if you like: I stayed here to kill Garton."

Corbus gave a brittle laugh. "Blood sweatin', eh? Well, Garton ain't fool enough to show up here to be butchered. Your best chance is to hunt him, if you mean business. Why hang to a stove-up spread where there ain't no cattle?"

"There are cattle," countered the girl. "Big bush steers, hiding in the manzanita and scrub oak of the hills. Wild as deer. Hard to get them out and hard to—"

"What?" Anger stiffened the stranger's face and hard light shone in his eyes. "You chicken-livered cow crammers call yourself loyal to yore gal boss, pattin' yourself on the back while you sit on yore south end instead of gettin' out that big money beef—"

"Don't give me none of your tongue!" Ron Allison backed from the table, his gun hand stiff, his face stiff with rage. "You can't come in here and—"

"Ron!" Jean's reprimand took the fire out of the young ramrod. He choked, met her stern glance. And

Corbus, seeing how it was with them, masked the hurt of his years behind a scornful lip.

"My acquaintance with yore father, ma'am," he said harshly, "was short. But it meant enough to me to want to help him out now. Yore boys here seem to have lost their guts. Give 'em to me an' I'll get out that hill beef or make four henyard cowpunchers hunt their holes."

"It isn't their fault," she told him spiritedly. "I decided it wasn't worth risking the lives of men to—"

"You've changed yore mind!" broke in Corbus, with finality. "Tomorrow, come daylight, we start chousin' them big beefs out of the brush. It's for Tom Thatcher, no one else, you understand? An' God help them that stand in my way. Which goes for you gents as well as for Colt Garton an' his bushwhackers."

He glared at them, as if daring revolt, hitched his gun belt and turned abruptly outside, where darkness had fallen and where the gale lashed black cloud masses across the cold stars. Later, when the crew came to the bunkhouse, they found him stretched out under blankets, sound asleep.

DAWN was not yet a promise in the east and rain beat thunderously on the bunkhouse roof when Carse Corbus' terse, "Roll out of that, you mail-order cow nurses," roused the sleeping T Down hands.

It was bitter cold. Breath came white from their nostrils as they crawled from warm blankets, the two oldsters tight-lipped with rheumatic pains, the button drugged and heavy-eyed with sleep and Ron Allison muttering something about it being "A crack-brained idea of a meddling old fool."

When their eyes were used to the light he had made, they saw that Corbus was dripping wet from some foray outside and his eyes were burning as if with some vast impatience to square whatever his debt was to old Tom Thatcher.

"Come on, snap into it!" he hurried them. "A man would think you'd never had no sleep. Well, from now on you'll carry yore lantern to work an' ketch yore sleepin' on the fly. Hurry up, the gal's holdin' breakfast for yuh."

There was a tight-strung tension at the table, the four hands sulking, Corbus watching them with the cold, critical eye of a slave driver. When the meal was over, Ron Allison rebelled.

"This tomfoolery has gone far enough, Jean. This hombre is herdin' us out into this storm like a bunch of mangy ketch dogs. And for what? A man can't work cattle in this kind of weather. I don't mind gettin' pitchforked into hell if it gains the outfit anything, but—"

"Ma'am," broke in Corbus with a savage smile, "no outfit goes belly up because some human wolf hamstrings it, but because it's carryin' too many coyotes. If there's any yellow in the T Down, I'll bring it into the open. If there's any bunch quitters in the outfit, you'll be able to name 'em off when I get through with 'em. Of course, if you ain't behind me, lock, stock an' barrel, to help yore dad—"

There was a new light in the girl's eyes and she looked at him in a way that made Ron furious. "I haven't made so good at this that I can refuse you the try," she said fervently. "All I ask is that you make it as easy on them as possible."

"Easy." His scornful eyes seemed to look right through them. "That's what's the matter. They've had it

too easy. All I'll promise is that I won't ask 'em to tackle anything I won't be first to do myself. Come on now, get into yore slickers an' let's go."

He led the way into the rain and to the corrals. Ponies were cold and wet and mean, humping their backs to take the saddles and pitching viciously when mounted. When Corbus' fine animal showed fight, he wasted no time with it, stunning it with the loaded end of his quirt and bringing it to all fours, quivering.

When the men were mounted and ready. Carse Corbus sidled his pony around them. "Lead out, Allison," he ordered crisply. "Show me where yore hill range is an' I'll show you how to work it."

And he did, too. All that long, cold day the skies wept. The brush was sodden with rain. Trails were grease slick and treacherous. All of them were soaked to the skin, slickers regardless, before they reached the manzanita where the big renegade steers lurked. They fanned out, a rope length apart, rimming the hill.

"*Yippee-e-e!* Comin' at you!"

Skeeter's shrill yell dropped down the slant. A thudding of swift hoofs. Crashing of brush. Low-hanging fog shortened the foreground for every man, but instantly ropes were unsnapped and loops spun out. Out of the pall a great red steer came quartering down the slant. Smoky Shane, first to see him, was spurring, whirling his loop. He closed fast, but his horse slipped, floundered and went down, throwing him. The big horned critter swerved, but Hondo Grimes had him cut off. His rope spun out, missed because the manila was stiff with ice.

The steer leaped a patch of red manzanita and Ron Allison sent his rope curling over its spreading horns. The line hummed taut, with sixteen hundred pounds of beef on one end and man and horse on the other. It slowed the beef animal, took the horse off its feet. Carse Corbus, racing in with swinging rope, put his twine onto the steer. Bawling, the great horned creature lunged over the rim, jerking both horses and riders with him.

The three other hands loped down to the rim, expecting to look at tragedy. Instead, out of the welter of steer and men and horse, they saw Corbus dart to the beef with palmed hogging strings. Both horses were up, holding the steer with braced legs. Ron Allison was coming to his feet, a rod removed from his mount. When the struggling cow critter was tied, they dragged him to a sapling, necked him down to tame out. Ron's pony was limping badly when he topped the rim again.

Shortly afterward, Skeeter broke his rope on another thundering renegade. And, still later, Smoky Shane lost rope and cinch. That was the way it went throughout the whole miserable day, during which they did the outfit very little good. Dragging homeward, on a night-gloomed trail, Ron voiced his resentment.

"The whole idea is loco," he raged. "An' if we try to go through with it, somebody's going to get killed."

"Want to bunch it?" jeered Corbus.

"No, I don't want to bunch it, but what's the use of it? We ain't equipped to handle that big beef. Boneyard horses an' junkpile gear, with no money to buy what we need."

"You boys don't cut much of a dash," chuckled the gaunt man. "I'll have to send you scramblin' for other excuses by outfittin' you proper."

"Fat chance you've got," said Ron bitterly, and then there was silence between them as they took a stiffer

pace across the rain-drenched flats to the T Down.

Chilled, weary, woebegone, they sat down to the hot meal Jean had ready for them. The T Down hands, patently close to revolt, had little to say. Jean listened to Corbus' brief report, weighted the results, then smiled bravely.

"Maybe it will go better tomorrow. At least, there's little chance of trouble with Garton and his men in weather like this."

From supper, the hands went directly to the bunkhouse to bed. A fire was built in the pot-bellied stove, the wet clothes hung about it. All but those Corbus wore. He didn't even take his off, choosing to sit on the edge of his bunk, staring studiously at the floor as he smoked cigarette after cigarette. Not until a chorus of snores lifted from the other bunks did he stir. Then he came erect, the play of firelight from the stove grill making his gaunt face more shadowy, more unreadable than before. For a moment he stood stiffly, listening to the breathing, then he tiptoed to the door.

"Where you going?" Ron Allison called drowsily.

An acrid chuckle floated back. "To see a hawss about a man." The door closed softly and Carse Corbus was out in the storm.

As on the previous morning, Corbus woke them before dawn. "Pile out, you two-bit cow teasers," he yelled. "What you think this is, your Sunday off?"

Rain still peppered the roof and, in the light of the smoky lamp, they noted that he was wet through, a little more gaunt, his eyes red rimmed from sleeplessness. His impatience edged with a grim humor, he hazed them to the house, through a swift breakfast and out to the corrals.

"Won't bother with them T Down crowbaits no more," he told them. "Work stock is stalled in the barn. Look to yore cinches."

He followed them into the barn, listening to their excited comments about what they saw there. Horses, stout, well bred horses worked busily at the hay that had been forked down to them. There were ten top mounts, counting Corbus' personal horse, and half of them were rigged with fine three-quarter-rigged saddles. Stout, well broken ropes hung from the horns and behind each cantle a spare slicker, caught by the knotted saddle strings. It was unbelievable.

"Cripes!" yelped Skeeter. "Who brung them ponies here?"

"Santy Claus!" Corbus said tartly. "Christmas, ain't it? An' you boys has had yore stockings hung up for a long time, ain't you?"

"Look here, Corbus!" Ron Allison's face was stiff. "This is Buttonhook stock! How'd they get here?"

Corbus grinned. "It's a cinch they didn't stray here, young feller."

"There's a fresh running-iron vent through each brand," said Ron, going over the animals carefully. "And these saddles and equipment—damn it. Corbus, you trying to make rustlers out of us?"

Corbus glared. "I'm trying to make you into a cow outfit," he snapped. "These ponies is now orphans, needin' the lovin' care of real horsemen. Do you want to use 'em or do you want to quit? You're wastin' time. Throw sawbucks onto them spares an' fetch down your blankets in tarps. Skeeter, you tote down the grub boxes Jean's got packed for us. We ain't comin' back to no more home luxury till we've

rounded up doctor money for Tom Thatcher. You savvy? Now get movin'!"

They were getting used to his snarly orders, and to obeying them. Jean and Skeeter soon came down from the house, carrying grub boxes. The girl looked rugged and determined in her faded Levis and weathered Stetson.

"Saddle my pony, Mr. Corbus," she ordered. "I'm going along to keep camp."

"You're stayin' right here!" rapped the stranger.

Jean's temper flared. "Don't you tell me what I'm to do," she flared. "I'm boss of the T Down and you'll take orders from me. Or else you'll go down the trail talking to yourself. Saddle my pony!"

Corbus flashed a snaggle-tooth grin. "Yes'm," he murmured. "That's the way I like to hear a feller talk. There's hope for this hen-yard outfit yet."

Through a sodden drizzle the outfit wound into the deep hills, where a disreputable cabin waited with sagging roof and gaping doors and windows to receive them. The fresh stock, good equipment and change all worked to put now life into the hands. Their sullenness fell away and eagerly they fell to making the old line camp comfortable for Jean. They chopped wood, cleaned out the rusty stove, mucked up the floor and rigged a swinging platform to keep food away from the pack rats.

Corbus held aloof, watching them with silent satisfaction. And when all was in order about the camp, he descended on them.

"What you standin' around for, you half-cooked saddle whackers? Rig yore tops for big beef. We're settin' forth to build us a herd."

His domineering manner brought back their old sullenness, but no spark of revolution. Grumbling, they hit their saddles and followed up the canyon trail. Rain, rain, and more rain. Water sluicing off their hats and sloshing in their boots. Bone-chilling fog swirling before a snarly, changing wind. Smoky and Hondo, gray-faced and stiff rode behind Corbus, unwilling as yet to admit that another oldster of their own age could outdo them. Ron Allison was nursing a grouch at the uselessness of it. Skeeter, patently afraid of the cold-eyed stranger from nowhere, brought up the rear, sitting on his hands to warm them.

Corbus angled up a steep hillside, worming his way through the brush to the foot of rimrock. Pausing there to cast his eyes down upon a vague, fog-hazed landscape of tumbled hill land, basalt upthrusts and red thickets of manzanita where big beef lay hidden.

"Yonder she lies, boys," he croaked. "As nice a patch of cow heaven as ever a man rode over. Tear into it. Work her slick an' clean. Three beefs for each man an' we'll go in to supper. Scatter out!"

DOWN they went, fanning wide as they slipped their loop straps. Down a hillside treacherous with loose stone, slipping mud and tiny torrents boiling toward the creek. Each man crowding his mount through icy-wet manzanita, thick as dog hair and cruel as bear claws. Horses fighting always for footing and men standing in the stirrups as they searched for wide horns.

"Yonder they bust!"

Corbus' croak came drifting up to them. There was a great smashing of brush and rattle of stones down the slant. Dimly through the fog, they saw cows and calves quartering down the hill, heads high and tails

wringing. Behind them came larger, darker forms, their hair sleek and shiny with rain. Steers.

Every man was spurring now, rope swinging. Corbus yipping like a coyote, was turning the critters toward rimrock. The rest were closing in from behind. Ron Allison, watching Corbus flash in and rope a big beef, found himself half hoping the steer might drag him down. And thus indulging his dislike of the man, he missed the critter that got up right under his feet, breaking back behind them. Skeeter was tied to a big red ox that bulleted down the slope, taking horse and rider with him.

The tally from that particular patch of brush was three wild yaks, each of which had to be horn-lashed to a tree until starved and punished into tractability. And the T Down hands, well mounted and equipped now, were beginning to rise to the thrill of the dangerous game.

So it went till dusk began to gloom the storm-lashed hill lands. Carse Corbus always in the van, shaming them to better than their best, wasting few loops, snarling off weariness, bruises and occasional failure. When they rode down the darkening trail toward camp, a sense of satisfaction was their antidote for exhaustion and misery. Their tally for the half day was twelve, all big steers and real money at the present market.

Jean had hot food ready for them. But first they tasted the initial evidence of humanity in the gaunt man who drove them. He went to his saddle roll, brought forth a bottle. His slash mouth twisted in a grin. "You boys fell down on me today. You're three beefs shy. But yo're showin' some promise an' I reckon you've earned a good pull at this flask of corn."

Smoky Shane raised it to his mouth greedily, took two swallows, wiped the neck on his shirt sleeve and passed it to Hondo. So it passed around the circle, even Skeeter gratefully taking a pull. Two-thirds of the contents was gone when Corbus put it away, but it had served to thaw out something deeper than the chill in them. They were suddenly mellow and, for the first time, Ron Allison smiled at Carse Corbus. In the grimace was understanding of one man for the way of another.

"That one to the mendin' of old Tom Thatcher, feller," said Ron.

"A swift an' hearty mendin', Allison," added the strange, wolfish man.

The days that followed were much the same. The rain reduced to a drizzle and then stopped altogether. But no sun came out to dry the soaked earth. Fog blanketed the hills, keeping the brush forever wet. There were big day and meager ones, but the tally grew, head by head. Forty steers were driven down and penned at the home ranch. Later thirty were hazed down to swell the total. It was fifty tons of beef and Corbus seemed content. The night he announced an end to the gather, Jean burst into tears, threw her arms about the neck of the gaunt, grizzled man and kissed him impulsively.

A frightened look came to his eyes and pallor struck through the bronze of his sharp features. He disengaged her arms quickly. "You shouldn't have done that, ma'am," he said, his voice harsh and condemning. To further show his displeasure, he stomped out into the night, leaving them to eat their suppers without him. Later Ron found him hunkered by the horse corral, smoking moodily.

"What kind of a man are you?"

Ron demanded angrily. "You upset Jean pretty bad. acting the way you did."

"Yeah?" Corbus' voice trembled, as with some vast inner rage. "What do you think she done to me?"

The young cowboy shook his head. "I can't make you out," he confessed. "Most gents would give their right hands to be kissed by a girl like her."

"Not me. I want no part of women or their kisses."

"She was only trying to show her gratitude, Corbus."

"She was trying to make a fool of me. I know how it is with you all. You hate my guts. That's fine."

"You're wrong. You made us hate you at first, but that's over an' done. You showed us the way an' now we're behind you to a man. I think Jean always had faith you'd do what she didn't dare hope could be done."

"Aw, go to hell!" rasped the strange man, and strode into the night.

NEXT day, before noon, they started the cattle out from the T Down, heading for the railroad loading pens at Apache Siding. It was a three-way drive a full day longer than to have gone straight to Aspen City. But this way there was less chance of grief from Garton and his gunmen.

Under lowering skies, they crossed the valley and went through Cowskin Pass in low hanging clouds. That night they bedded the cattle on a grassy bench above roaring North Fork. Supper was over and they were hugging the leaping campfire when their brief talk languished. Each one sat bolt upright, his ears reaching out for the dim and distant echoes of swift hoofbeats.

"Riders!" said Jean, her breath coming faster. Her frightened eyes went to Ron Allison.

There was an abrupt rising there at the fire. "Get back out of the light, miss, until we learn about this," ordered Carse Corbus.

"My place is with the rest," she said steadily. "But I think Ron should ride out to be with Skeeter at the herd."

"No," Ron refused the proffered security. "I'll stay here." And his hand was near his gun.

There was no more talk. Through the obscure night, they made out the jagged shadows of horsemen reining in beyond the circle of firelight. A flat voice crackled through the hush.

"Stand pat an' don't reach. You're covered an' easy targets. Let your hands trail while I come for your guns."

"Light down an' let's give a look at you, hombre," croaked Carse Corbus.

A saddle creaked and a man seemed to dissolve from his mount. As his spurs chimed forward, his full-throated voice issued an order. "Send a man over to look at their cavvy. An' call me back the brands."

He paused, with the firelight barely touching him. He was a tall man, yet so heavily built as to appear dumpy. But great strength was apparent in his rotund physique, arrogance in the rocky jaw and utter cruelty in the close-set jet eyes. His full, hard inspection took them all in. He opened his mouth as if to speak. Then his glance was locked with that of the gaunt, cadaverous man.

From the rope corral, where matches had flared briefly and died, a voice rang out, "All Buttonhooks, Colt. All but one—a Broken Arrow."

"Broken Arrow!" Colt Garton's lips formed the words. His face went gray as alkali and his eyes seemed to draw together. "Well, I'll be—"

"Colt Garton!" Corbus' laugh had an ugly ring. "That's good. You've changed some, amigo, an' not in a way to add to yore speed. Yeah, it's the Broken Arrow, an' the same one yo're recallin' from the past. There's nine Buttonhook broncs in the cavvy. What about 'em? An' there's some nice beef out yonder which mebby you'd like to make something out of. Well?"

Garton didn't answer. A horseman moved up beside him, one with the silver badge of authority on his breast. He was looking at Garton unbelievingly.

"What is this?" the sheriff demanded. "You drag me out here, Garton, with the yarn that the T Down has stole your cattle an' horses. When we get here, you fold up like a sleepin' accordeen. What's the idea?"

Garton's face hardened and his shoulders seemed to settle. His fingers splayed over his gun and blood poured back into his face. "Damn your soul, Lobo!" he raged. "I'm callin' your hand. I'm—"

"It's what I came back for, feller," Corbus broke in. "Cut loose yore wolf."

Garton's eyes shifted. Uncomfortably he turned to the sheriff. "Reckon it's on me, Duke. There's things here I couldn't have foreseen. Come on, boys, we'll ride back."

He whirled, hurried to his horse and rose to the saddle. The sheriff, puzzled and unconvinced, looked at the equally puzzled faces of those at the fire, then reined about to join the cavalcade roaring away into the night.

FOR moments while those hoofbeats were dying out toward the pass, Corbus stood there. Lines seemed to have left his face and bitterness his eyes when he turned to them again.

"Well, folks"—his voice seemed less harsh—"the troubles of the T Down are over. When Garton, which ain't his name at all, saw me, he thought he was looking at a ghost. He'll leave now, sudden an' for far places."

"Why?" Jean's voice was full of bewilderment.

"Because, as long as he knows I'm alive, he'll be runnin' an' hidin' like the coyote he is. You'll have no more bother. And as long as my job here is done, I'll be headin' yonderly."

"But you can't, Mr. Corbus. You want to see dad and—" Jean rushed to him, caught him by the arms.

Corbus, granite-gray, looked down into her pleading eyes. "You don't understand, ma'am. I came here to see Tom Thatcher, yes. But just to kill him. Then when I find him down, I pitch in to make doctor money, hoping to get him on his feet so I can face him with guns. I take these boys"—his chill eyes flashed to the T Down hands—"right into hell an' back, puttin' 'em through paces no right-thinkin' puncher would undertake. An' they follow me through, fightin' for old Tom to the last drop. I tried to make 'em hate me, an' damned if they didn't turn out to like me, to be my good friends. An' you—you kissed me, ma'am, the first woman to do that since my mother died. It done somethin' to me. It cooled my hate, made me see that Tom Thatcher, when he sent me to the pen, was only doin' his duty—"

"Dad," Jean gasped. "Dad sent you to prison?"

"When he was sheriff of Sahuaro

County, ma'am. I served my time an' I'm free. But the man who done the thing I was nabbed for, the man who framed me into it, the man who was hunted for the same job, that man never answered to the law. That was Colt Garton! Durin' this roundup, I found my hate for Tom Thatcher coolin', my hate of Garton burnin' hotter. But when I faced him, read the fear in his fat carcass, my killin' urge clabbered. So I decided it would plague him worse to leave his ill-gotten outfit here an' play coyote for the rest of his life. So now I'll say adios an'—"

"Wait!" Jean resisted his effort to break away. "You've got to stay, you hear me? You've taught us to depend on you, to trust you, to—to like you. You can't go away now and leave a success that is mostly yours."

There was a glimmer of emotion in his shuttered eyes. "Mebby if I'd heard them expressions of friendship, ma'am, when I was a button, bein' kicked from pillar to post, I'd be fit to accept what yo're offerin'. But—" He disengaged her hands gently.

Ron Allison, who had been watching silently, fastened the gaunt man's wiry arm in his strong fingers. "Looky here, you hard-shelled old rannihan," he cried. "You come here an' run a blind sandy on us. An' now you're runnin' one on yourself. Didn't you hear what Jean said? She's your boss, just as she is mine. An' you'll obey orders or I'll knock your ears down."

Corbus' thin lips parted in a grin. "All right, feller," he muttered. "That's the way I like to hear a hairpin talk. There's hope for Tom's hen-yard cow outfit yet." And he ambled sheepishly back to hunker beside the fire.

Behind him came Ron Allison, his arm about Jean and his smiling eyes fixed on hers. Up above, the breaking clouds parted and the moon shone down, full and golden. And, afar off, a coyote howl seemed to be snatched away by some benign hand and squeezed into a silence fraught with peace.

THE END

Pullin' Leather

By S. OMAR BARKER

I'VE done my share of braggin' when it come my turn to spiel,
An' rode some salty broncos at the ol' chuck-wagon wheel.
I've told about the buckers that I've cured of sneeze an' snort,
An' never pulled no leather, as a peeler hadn't ort.
From colts jest off the grama to the outlaws of the shows,
I've set up there an' scratched 'em, all the way from flank to nose.
Seems like I'm shore a rider that no man has ever saw
Reach out to grab the button when my seat's too fur from taw.
But when a feller's ridin' forty miles from hell-an'-gone,
An' his hoss lets in to buck a spell, there's ways of stayin' on
That ain't considered proper to a buckarooster's pride—
Well, boots ain't made to walk in—so you've kinder got to ride.
It's took you by surprise, of course, 'way out there all alone,
An' the cactus beds around you make your innards fairly groan.
So you've got to keep astraddle, an' you aim to stay on top,
But you feel yourself a-slippin' an' you hear your shirt-tail pop.
Your Stetson's gone a-sailin', an' you'll foller purty quick
Unless you clamp to somethin' that will sorter help you stick.
That's when you grab the biskit like you'd growed up on a farm.
You'll shore dehorn that saddle or you'll throw away an arm!
There ain't no grandstand watchin', so you shore would be a fool
To let that pony throw you for the sake of any rule!
I've done my share of braggin', an' it shore can't be denied
That no *man* ever seen me pullin' leather on a ride.
But forty miles from nowheres—well, a cowboy hates to walk,
An' most of us is thankful that the hoss ain't fixed to talk!

HATE RIDES VALLEY PASS

by EUGENE R. DUTCHER

Hate Rides Valley Pass

TROUBLE hung close to Bob Huxley as he entered Borderville's main street along toward evening. His eyes moved searchingly along the warped store fronts. They were bitter eyes that did not seem to go with his tan, clean-cut features.

Here in Borderville he was to look up one Dutch Swinger. "Dutch can always use boys like you what are broke and sore at the big cattlemen," the bartender over in Butte had told him confidentially. "Dutch pays off fast and mighty good—if you're looking for that kind of money."

Well, Bob Huxley thought grimly, he was. Little muscles quivered along his jaw. Desperation held his shoulders stiff as he dismounted at a hitchrack. His hand trembled a bit as he slapped the dust from the gray's flank so the B Bar H brand showed plainly. He'd been mighty proud of his little spread. That was before those two big outfits had caught him between them and squeezed—squeezed until there was nothing left. Five years' hard work wiped out in three short months, just so those big-time cattlemen could gobble up a few more waterholes that they didn't need.

Vaguely Huxley realized that two men had pushed out of a saloon's swinging doors across the street, and stood on the boardwalk rolling smokes. At their heels slunk a huge, gray dog of uncertain breed. The animal crouched low as its eyes fastened on a black cat, preening itself before the general store, while its young owner, a boy of about twelve, admired a mouth-watering display of rock candy in the window.

It was clear that the dog would not charge without its burly master's consent, and Huxley, not realizing there were men who would enjoy seeing such a battle, let his thoughts drift bitterly back to that night when he had stood by the smoldering ruins of his ranchhouse.

The law had been sorry, but the law had done nothing—not against the cattle barons who could make or break a sheriff, who could wreck and crush and steal from the weak with immunity. Who could actually order a man out of the country and make it stick!

Bob Huxley kept licking the hot dryness from his lips. It was like a fever burning inside him. They were all alike, those proud, domineering range overlords. He could not collect from the ones who had ruined him, but here around Borderville there would be other cattlemen who had built their power on the crushed dreams of men like himself. Well, from them he'd take back what he had lost, and he'd do it Dutch Swinger's way—fast and in big gobs. It would mean a new start for him on some far-off range. It would mean justice.

ACROSS the street the gray mongrel sent a red tongue licking eagerly over long fangs. It whined hungrily, turning eager eyes up to its master.

Huxley noticed suddenly that the square-built man had a mean grin on his broad face. Then the fellow callously motioned the dog forward.

Instantly the beast sprang. A gray streak in the gathering gloom, it rushed silently across the street toward the unsuspecting boy and cat.

Huxley tensed. If the lad got in the way of those bared fangs! The

thought sent him diving under the hitchrack.

"Look out, kid!" he shouted as the cat twisted and seemed suddenly to explode. Every black hair on end, yellow eyes glaring, it squalled and held its ground.

The boy, oblivious of his own danger, scooped his pet up and held the screaming, clawing little beast high above his head as the gray dog lunged against his chest.

"Stay with it, son," Huxley encouraged, rushing forward. He was aware of the booming laughter of the two men across the street. The fools were enjoying this. Then Huxley's long fingers closed in the loose skin of the dog's neck. He sent it sailing, end for end, to strike hard in the road dust twenty feet away. Snarls turned to whines of fear, and the dog slunk off, bushy tail low between its quivering flanks. Meanwhile, the boy had reached a porch upright, up which the cat hastily scrambled.

No longer was there laughter from across the street. Huxley watched the two come striding toward him and it occurred to him that the big-chested one looked a lot like his dog now, lips curled back in a mat of black whiskers, red-eyed with rage. The other was a jackknife of a man, thin, tall, solemn-faced, hung heavily with .45s about the hips. Huxley noticed a few merchants and loungers had come into doorways, but held carefully to shelter. He was facing gun trouble, he suddenly realized.

"Your dog," he said softly, as the two came up to him, "might have hurt the boy."

"So what?" The dog owner rasped, blunt fingers through his beard, but his right hand hung motionless, and low. "You're talking to Dutch Swinger, fella."

Huxley's lips tightened a little as he realized this was the man he had come to work for. He hesitated, then reached into a shirt pocket.

"I guess," he said, "I've a letter to you from a bartender over in Butte."

Dutch Swinger warily remained in his crouch. "Take a look at it, Jigger," he barked at his tall, loose-jointed companion. Jigger Tully's long arm snaked forward for the note.

"This guy is on the level all right, Dutch," he said after a moment. "It's from Charley Rance over in Butte. He says Bob Huxley here is sour on the world, and ought to make you a good hand, considering the job you're up against just now."

But Dutch Swinger's boots only sunk a little deeper into dust. "Don't need him," he grunted. "I don't like the cut of your hair, fella."

Huxley leaned forward. "And I don't like the curl of your whiskers, either, Swinger," he retorted. "But this is strictly business with me. I came to you for a job because it meant big pay fast, and from the men I want to take it from. And you can take that or leave it!"

Jigger Tully's eyes popped wide in his long, oval head. He backed off a little out of the line of fire. Men just didn't talk that way to Dutch Swinger.

But Swinger was looking over Huxley's shoulder to where the boy, out of earshot, was trying to coax the black cat down from the porch upright. A slow grin spread across his broad face.

"The kid there is Tad Furner," he rasped, voice low. "His dad is Herb Furner, a big cattleman. I need somebody on Furner's payroll bad, see? You get that job and it will mean big dough for you."

There was time for little more be-

cause the kid had managed to coax his frightened pet down.

"Me and Jigger will be waiting for you out behind the Nugget Saloon," Swinger muttered and turned away.

HUXLEY stood waiting as the boy hurried forward with the black cat still spitting under his arm.

"Gee, mister," Tad Furner showed Huxley a much freckled face. "I was sure scared you'd have trouble with them two. They're plenty mean. I'd have helped you only I had to get Cougar down." He patted the slowly quieting cat. "Golly, I was getting scratched up plenty when you stepped in. My dad will sure want to thank you for helping me." He seemed to take in Huxley's worn outfit as he added, "Maybe you need a job, huh?"

It was as easy as that, yet Huxley did not answer at once. He did not like the idea of taking advantage of this younker's feeling of gratitude. Then bitterness came creeping back into his eyes again. Tad's father was rich, a powerful cattleman like those other two who had wiped him out. Here was the very chance he had come looking for.

"I sure do need a job, son," Huxley said. "Suppose I meet you here in twenty minutes. I've a couple of things to attend to."

Street lights were flickering on along the street as Huxley made his way cautiously to the back of the Nugget Saloon. He did not like the feeling of sneaking, which he suddenly experienced. It was new to him.

Jigger Tully's long form took shape before him and Dutch Swinger was outlined against the light from the street. The gray dog cringed at his master's heels, snarling fiercely as Huxley approached.

"Down, Ripper," Swinger growled. "Get down! You got the job, fella."

"I did," Huxley answered, "and I'm hankering to know where my cut comes in."

Both men might have been calling for gunplay, their voices were that harsh. No friendship here, just a means to an end. Each needed the other.

Dutch Swinger hunched his powerful shoulders forward. "Easy, hombre," he warned. "Easy. I'm running a big shipment of guns and ammunition across the border tonight, see. And I've got to go through Furner's range. The rest of the cattlemen have the border closed tight, but there are three passes on Furner's spread and he can't guard them all. It's up to you to find out which pass will be open."

Huxley rubbed slow fingers over the knuckles of his left hand. Somehow, he was glad the job was not rustling, even if he would be stealing from the big boys.

"Those guns," he asked. "Are they for a revolution brewing in Mexico?"

"Huh?" Dutch Swinger grunted, eying his new man curiously. "Oh . . . yeah, a revolution. The fact is," he added, with a sly wink at Jigger Tully, "you'll be doing them poor peons a favor. The present government ain't no good."

Tully was striking a match to light his cigarette when a buckboard passed along the lighted street. Tad Furner was running alongside with Cougar in his arms.

"Hey, sis," he called to the girl at the reins, "I'll be home soon. Got to wait for a friend. Gee, you'll sure like him."

The match flared, revealing dimly

for an instant, the faces of the three men in the alley. Swinger viciously knocked it from Tully's fingers.

"You fool," he hissed. "What if the girl seen us talking back here with Huxley, then seen him out at her old man's ranch? Don't you think she'd guess he was a spy! You want to get Huxley killed afore he can get the dope for us?"

"Ah, she couldn't of recognized us," Tully whined. "It was too far."

But Huxley wasn't so sure. The girl had been looking directly into the alley. Well, he was getting paid to take chances.

"I'd better be getting back," he said now. "The kid will be waiting for me."

"Yeah," Swinger grunted, "and we'll be waiting for you, too. When you're plumb sure which passes Herb Furner means to guard, sneak away. Ride along the willows east of the ranch. Me and Jigger will be watching for you. Good luck, kid."

The two men stood smoking until Huxley was well away.

"Maybe Dutch, you shouldn't of lied to him about them guns," Tully said anxiously. "I got it figured this Huxley ain't really a tough guy. If Herb Furner tells him the truth, then what?"

"Then," Dutch grinned, "it'll be too late for Huxley to back out, even if he wants to! Come on."

THE Furner ranch was even bigger than Huxley had expected. Tad, mounted on his pony with Cougar perched up in front of him, rode at his side, proudly pointing out the different buildings, while not far on their left and hidden in the willows that lined the small stream, Swinger and Tully trailed them close.

Sweat dampened Huxley's palms, and he hardly heard the youngster's voice. Soon now he must face the scrutiny of Tad's sister. Suppose she recognized him? A dozen or more grim punchers grouped before the bunkhouse did not make Huxley feel any more comforted.

Horses stood saddled and waiting. Shadows moved across the shaded windows of the large ranch building. And a tightness was in the very air. Huxley wondered why cattlemen should be so intent on stopping an arms shipment into Mexico. That was none of their business. There was more to this than Dutch Swinger had told him, a heap more.

"Come on in, Bob," Tad called dismounting, "and meet dad and sis."

Herb Furner was a big, gray-haired man with a rather worried air.

"I'm glad to meet you, Huxley," he said after Tad had explosively told his story. "Any man who'll stand up to Swinger is welcome here. Now if you'll excuse me I must finish some business with my foreman."

It happened then. As Herb Furner entered the den off the living room a girl came from the hallway. She stopped short at sight of Huxley.

"Lola," Tad cried, "this is Bob Huxley, the fellow I was telling you about."

Lola Furner came toward them slowly. "Why, I know you," she said to Huxley. "We've met before, but I can't quite remember where."

Huxley started breathing again. "I'm afraid not," he answered. "I'm a stranger in these parts."

The puzzled look did not leave Lola's eyes. "Won't you sit down?" she invited. "I'm sorry if we seem inhospitable. You see, we're expecting trouble with Dutch Swinger before morning. We're positive he has

a large pack train hidden somewhere in the mountains ready to slip guns across the border. But we have no proof that the law will accept."

She brushed dark curls nervously back from her forehead. "Once Swinger arms his Mexicans and the white renegades waiting across the border it will mean raids—raids on our cattle, raids on our homes. That—that must not happen," she whispered, turning away to stroke Cougar's glossy back in an effort to hide her emotions.

Huxley reached for the makings. So Dutch Swinger had lied to him about the Mexican revolution! Swinger meant to start a scourge along the border. Well, what of it? Hadn't he come here to take back what men like Herb Furner had taken from him? This was a perfect set-up. But the hurt look on Lola's face and the scared eyes of young Tad, made him feel uneasy and a little ashamed.

HERB FURNER came in from the den then, breaking into Huxley's thoughts. The rancher was followed by his solemn-faced foreman.

"If we try to guard all three passes," Furner was saying worriedly, "Swinger will be able to break through any one of them. We haven't enough men to stop him. It means taking a gamble and leaving one pass open so we'll have enough strength at the other two. Of course, we aren't sure he'll try our section at all."

Huxley seemed intent on rolling his smoke. This was the information he had been sent to get. He was aware that Lola was watching him curiously.

"If Swinger tries the valley pass," Furner went on, "it will mean he has to go right by the ranch here. I don't think he'd take that chance, figuring I wouldn't leave the ranch unprotected. So we'll cover the east and west passes."

"I don't like it, Herb," the foreman protested. "What if Swinger should come this way? You know how he hates you. It would be like him to burn the whole spread. Better we all stay here and let Swinger get through with his guns. Later you could import more men and protect our herds from his raids. It's safer."

Huxley watched the old cattleman's lips go gray. "Yeah," Furner agreed grimly, "it would be safer. I could import more men, but how about the little ranchers? They couldn't afford that. Why, in six months Swinger would wipe them out! They're doing their share in this fight. I promised them to guard this section and I'll do it the best I can."

The words did not quite register on Huxley's brain. A powerful cattleman worrying about his small neighbors? Taking a chance of being burned out to protect the little fellows? It did not add up.

Furner had turned to Huxley. "You wouldn't be much good in the mountains," he said, "not knowing the territory. I'm asking you to stay here with Lola and Tad. If Swinger should come this way, don't try to stop him. Just get away into the hills, the three of you."

Lola was standing in the darkness of the porch. Quietly Huxley joined her there as Tad, eager to help, followed his father toward the barn. Huxley kept rubbing a hand over his forehead. He must get this thing straight, and there were only minutes left. The men were mounting. And in those willows that ran close past the barn Dutch Swinger and Tully would be waiting.

"Your father," he said to Lola, "is risking a lot just to protect his weaker neighbors."

The girl's small chin went high with pride. "My dad," she answered, "has never forgotten that once he was a small cattleman, too. He remembers how terribly hard it was. Why, dad has helped at least a dozen families when they were about to go broke!"

Automatically Huxley struck a match. The tiny explosion of the sulphur was like the sudden clearing of his thoughts. He was wrong, all wrong. Why, he was helping to crush fellows just like himself—little cattlemen that Herb Furner was fighting to protect. He'd call Herb Furner back and tell him the truth. There was still time.

Lola's sharp drawn breath made him glance at her. She was staring at him in the red, wavering match light, as the flame touched the cigarette. When she had seen him before his face had been highlighted like this, with shadows under high cheekbones.

"IT was you," she gasped, "in the alley with Swinger and Tully. You—you're a spy!"

She whirled away from him, her lips parted to call out. Huxley knew what would happen should she summon those grim riders back. He must have time to explain! His left arm shot out and encircled her waist. His right hand covered her mouth, stifling a scream, as young Tad, calling excited good-bys, followed the cavalcade from sight around the barn.

Hardly had the riders vanished when a figure loomed at the porch corner, and Dutch Swinger came swaggering forward, gun bared.

"Nice going, Huxley," he chuckled, "you done a right good job so far."

Jigger Tully, long, loose-jointed, hovered eagerly in the background. "What's the dope?" he asked. "Which passes are them fools going to cover?"

Huxley did not look at Lola, but he seemed to feel the cold drive of her eyes, accusing him of helping to bring disaster to this peace-loving range. Huxley knew then what he must do. He looked squarely into the eyes of Dutch Swinger.

"Furner," he said crisply, "is taking half of the men into the east pass. The rest are going to wait up this valley. That leaves the west pass wide open."

Huxley hoped neither man would glance at Lola. He could see that she realized he had lied, and she was trembling with sudden hope. Swinger was chuckling with satisfaction and Huxley saw his plan about to work. He tried not to think of himself going into the west pass with Swinger and the pack train, where Furner's men would be waiting to wipe them out. After all, a fellow has to pay for his mistakes.

"We got to get moving," Swinger grinned. "Come dawn, them guns will be safe in Mexico. Better tie up the girl and the younker, Jigger. Where is the kid, anyhow?"

Just then Tad came bounding around the corner of the barn. "Hey, sis!" he called, seeing only vague shadows on the porch. "What'll we do if Swinger brings the pack train up the valley while dad and the rest are watching the other two passes?"

"Tad," Lola called warningly, but the damage had been done.

Swinger's gun swung around to prod Huxley's ribs with a painful thrust. Angry animal grunts came from between his thick lips, and

Huxley braced himself for the shock of lead.

"So you crossed me, huh?" Swinger snarled. "Tried to run me into a trap?"

"Give it to him, Dutch," Tully hissed, holding the squirming Tad. "Give it to him."

But Dutch Swinger shook his head. Not till we're clear of this mess," he rasped. "Maybe the rat will come in handy." He snapped out brittle commands. "Head for the boys, Jigger," he ordered. "Start 'em up the valley with the train and set off the signal fires so our bunch on the border'll know we're coming this way. They'll be waiting at the head of the valley to meet us. We'll be crossing the border about dawn. Now get going."

IN the Furner living-room Dutch Swinger watched the three huddled in a corner, like an animal ready to pounce. He had stuffed Huxley's gun into his own bulging waistband. Hours dragged past with maddening slowness.

"Don't be afraid, sis," Tad kept murmuring. "I'll take care of you." Somehow, talking kept those scary chills from creeping up and down his own spine.

Bob Huxley had told Lola his story in low-voiced, bitter tones. He had drawn a picture of his fine little ranch wiped out, of a half-mad desire to regain all he had lost, fast, and at the expense of big cattlemen. Lola had said little, but the look in her eyes had told him she understood and did not blame him too much.

Now the only sound was the low growling of the great, gray dog, Ripper. The animal had come slinking into the doorway and crouched there, waiting. From his perch on the table Cougar's baleful, yellow eyes watched. His hair was on end with rage at this intrusion.

The big clock on the mantel boomed out the hour of two and everyone started violently. Dutch Swinger came erect.

"We'll get some mounts saddled," he grunted. "When the pack train shows up we'll all be riding and there won't be no time then for saddling." He motioned Huxley toward a lantern hanging on a wall pig. "Light it," he ordered. "Then the three of you head for the barn and don't make no mistakes."

The lantern's yellow light was a moving circle about them as Huxley walked stiffly forward, Lola on his one side, Tad on the other. One thought kept returning to Huxley's mind. He must get word to Herb Furner. But he knew he'd not get ten feet before lead from Dutch Swinger's gun knocked him down. With Swinger trailing them close, the three moved past a large haystack and into the barn.

Every muscle tense, Huxley started to saddle the horses. If only that gun muzzle would swing away from his chest for an instant. But it did not, and soon the three were marching back toward the house. Ahead out in the open the haystack loomed. Now the lantern swung mechanically in Huxley's hand.

Behind him he could hear Dutch Swinger's heavy tread. Huxley took a deep breath. They were close beside the stack. Now! Suddenly the lantern swung in a wide arc as Huxley hurled it high into the loose hay. The flame was nearly blown from the wick, then it flared anew.

Swinger let out a bellow of rage and came raging forward as the lantern rolled slowly down the stack. Fire leaped swiftly along the trail of spilling kerosene.

So fast had it all happened that Huxley was still off balance when Swinger's gun muzzle struck him glancingly across the temple, sending him heavily to hands and knees. He felt himself being dragged back from the fast growing heat. There was a blindness in his eyes that cleared slowly. Lola and Ted were helping him to his feet. Red flames silhouetted the huge form of Dutch Swinger as he gave up his effort to put out the fire and rushed down on Huxley.

"If that fire brings Furner and his bunch back too soon," Swinger rasped, "if it does, so help me, fella, you'll wish I'd gunned you now."

Huxley was to remember those words. He flinched under a driving kick and staggered erect with Lola's help, while black smoke and red flames licked high into the night sky.

ONCE again the three huddled in the living room. Like a great spider Dutch Swinger crouched before the door. Cougar had left the table for the security of the mantel as Ripper slunk about the room.

Once Huxley touched Lola's cold hand. "Your father," he asked, low-voiced, "do you think he'll see the flames?"

Lola's eyes were dark and wide. "Yes," she whispered back. "West pass is visible from here, but it's a rough, hard ride back. I—I'm afraid—" She did not finish. Tad, at her side, just blinked fast and said nothing.

No longer was the fire throwing red against the curtains, and the clock ate away the minutes toward dawn. Nerves grew raw, eyes narrowed as if awaiting a momentary explosion. All knew men were racing toward them through the night, friends and foes, coming hard, and they must wait and wait. Huxley's throbbing head seemed to beat out the word over and over. "Wait . . . wait."

There was no sound of his coming, just the sudden appearance of Jigger Tully standing tall and thin in the doorway.

Swinger moved swiftly. "Get them horses from the barn," he rasped. "Furner is coming. Jump, you fool!"

Minutes later, Huxley was in the saddle. Lola rode at his side. Her face was white and tired in the early morning light.

"You did your best," she murmured. "You tried."

"There's still hope," Huxley said, trying to sound encouraging. "Your father may cut them off from the border." Immediately he wished he had kept still. It was not good to think what would happen to the three of them if that occurred. He had certainly made an awful mess of things, Huxley thought.

Tad's teeth were chattering, despite his best efforts to seem brave, while Cougar rode on the saddle, unwilling to be left behind, and Ripper snarled up at him.

The pack train moved slowly up the long grass-covered valley, twenty or thirty heavily laden animals with silent, alert riders at intervals down either side. Huxley, Tad and Lola were in the lead, followed closely by Swinger and Tully.

The eyes of each often turned to the dark forest fifty yards away on the west. From there Herb Furner and his men would come—if they came.

Huxley glanced sideways at Lola. "How much farther to the border?" he asked.

"Not far. A half mile perhaps." Lola's hands clasped the saddlehorn tightly. "It—it's getting light."

Gray swept up swiftly from the east. Suddenly Ripper started to bark fiercely as brush crashed on the mountainside.

"IT'S dad," cried Lola, as riders swept into view on the left. "They're comin'."

Her words were drowned in the vicious bellow of Dutch Swinger. "Steady does it, Furner," he boomed. "I got your girl and kid."

It seemed as if Herb Furner had run into a stone wall the way he pulled up with ten riders stopping short behind him.

"Now, that makes sense," called Swinger, " 'cause if you try to stop me, I'll let your kids have it in the back. So help me, I will!"

There was no doubt in Huxley's mind that Swinger meant every word. Furner realized it, too.

"Turn them free," the cattleman called, riding parallel with the still-moving pack train, "and I'll not bother you. You've got my word on it."

"I've got your kids," Swinger rasped back. "That's a heap better."

Perhaps only Huxley heard that note of hate in the killer's voice. Hate for Furner and all that was dear to him. And Huxley knew then that Lola and Tad were riding toward death or worse, regardless of the cattleman's decision.

Suddenly about a quarter of a mile ahead, many ragged men appeared on scrawny mounts. White renegades and lawless Mexicans. Dutch Swinger's recruits, waiting hungrily for guns that would make them into a pack of raiding, killing, mad dogs.

Lola's knee pressed Huxley's as she rode close beside him. "We can't—we mustn't let it happen," she murmured.

For terrible seconds Huxley said nothing. It's not easy to plan one's own death. Swinger and Tully were pressing them hard from behind. Huxley visualized what would happen should he suddenly rear his mount back into them.

A moment of confusion, while those two cut him down. Time for Lola and Tad to get a good start for the timber. After that it would be up to Herb Furner to see that his girl and boy reached safety. Huxley knew out here alone and unarmed, he'd not live thirty seconds, but that might be long enough to undo all the harm he had done.

"Lola—Tad," Huxley's voice was low, tense, pitched for their ears alone. "You'll have to make a break for it. When I say, 'Now,' ride hard for the timber."

Lola was looking up at him. "And you," she asked. "What will you do?"

"I'll follow you," said Huxley. He avoided meeting her eyes.

"Gee," Tad breathed, "you . . . you won't have a chance, Bob."

There was no time to argue. Up ahead, the renegades, sensing the situation, were charging across the border to meet the train. A few flourished guns. The rest yelled encouragement.

"Are you ready?" Huxley whispered.

Lola sat very straight now. "Ready," she answered, head held high. Tad just nodded, but there was a square set to his little jaw.

Huxley gave one glance at Furner helplessly, riding fifty yards away.

"NOW." As the single word burst from Huxley's lips he jerked on the reins. His startled mount went to its haunches, causing Swinger and Tully's horses to crash into it. Shouts and angry

oaths rang out. Here was that moment of confusion Huxley had planned on. But something was wrong!

Lola plunged her mount twenty feet off and now wheeled back. With Huxley's command Tad twisted in his saddle and hurled Cougar down full onto the bristling back of Ripper. Squealing horses reared frantically under their riders as Ripper's gray form plunged among them with a screaming black devil atop his back. So swiftly had it happened that only now was Furner starting forward.

Ten feet away Huxley saw Tully's mount bucking out of control. The outlaw's gun waved wildly as he tried to stay in the saddle. Huxley's eyes fastened on that .45 as he himself left his saddle and dropped to the ground. Off on his right he had a glimpse of Swinger coming in fast for the kill. Quickly Huxley lunged toward Tully. If he could get that gun!

Like clinging arms, the tall grass whipped about his knees. He went down heavily.

"In the belly, feller," boomed Swinger, gun muzzle lowering to his unarmed victim's middle. "In the belly!"

Men die hard with lead in their vitals. Huxley had seen them go that way. He came to a knee and for one terrible second looked up into Dutch Swinger's raging face. Then from the side came a streaking catapult.

Lola, riding far forward on her mount's neck, hair flying, was driving hard into Swinger. There was the sickening thud of flesh meeting flesh, of horses going to knees. Then Lola started to fall and Dutch Swinger grabbed his saddlehorn.

Huxley saw no more for he was up, racing on toward Tully. Everywhere guns were barking now as Huxley's arm closed about Tully's waist and dragged him down from his squealing, pitching mount.

Huxley's free hand closed on the .45, but Tully's long fingers held it fast. Over the killer's narrow shoulder Huxley saw Swinger regain his seat.

There was a madness in the man's little, black eyes. Only one thought now—to get lead into this man who had ruined his plans. It did not matter Tully's back was in the way. Tully could be moved. And the gun bucked and bucked again in Swinger's big paw.

With each blasting report Jigger Tully's long body jerked. His fingers loosened on the gun. He was crumpling and once again Huxley faced the vicious charge of Dutch Swinger, but now he held a .45. Held it ten inches below that snarling face and started it roaring.

Once Huxley nearly went down under the drive of lead. Once Dutch Singer grabbed for the saddlehorn with his left hand, but the right was still blazing lead.

HUXLEY felt strangely numb from the hips down. Black gunsmoke gathered before him, only to swirl away with the concussion of the .45. Orange flame lanced out at him from the back of the forward lunging horse.

Huxley tried to sidestep those flying hoofs, but his boots seemed rooted to the ground. His gun arm had lost its strength and the .45 flung limp in his hand. He had gone the limit. Now he was done. And Dutch Swinger still came on, riding stiffly erect, lips flattened against teeth, gun held before him. But Swinger's eyes were glassy, unseeing.

The fear-crazed horse swerved suddenly at sight of Huxley's figure weaving before it, and Swinger came pitching from the saddle, falling as only the dead fall. The rolling body struck the legs from under Huxley. He did not remember hitting the ground. His first clear thoughts were of Herb Furner. The rancher stood above him.

"He'll be all right," Furner was saying. "A nasty wound in the hip and two cuts across the ribs." The cattleman turned away. "Some of you boys round up them pack animals," he ordered. "And make sure them renegades keep going toward Mexico. They'll get no guns, thanks to this young fellow."

Huxley tried to sit up and found small hands pressing him back. Lola leaned close over him.

"I must tell your dad the truth." Huxley's whisper was hoarse.

"I'll tell him later," Lola smiled. "Dad has always said, 'It's not what a man starts out to do, it's what he does that counts.' He'll understand."

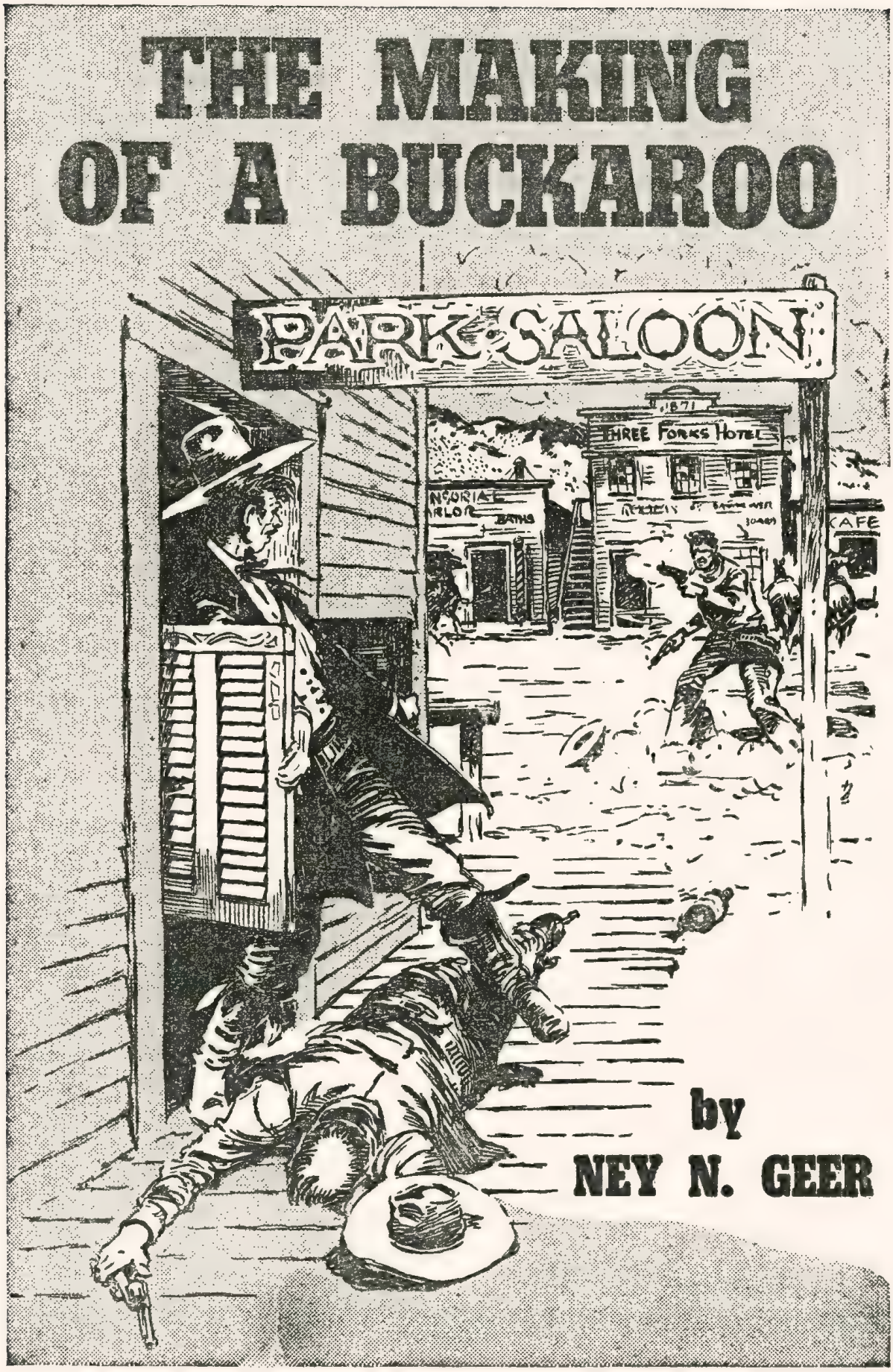
Tad came running up with Cougar in his arms. "Boy, did he give Ripper a riding," he yelled. Then his elation died suddenly. "Say, dad," he asked, as an appalling thought occurred to him, "do you reckon Cougar will ever forgive me for dropping him on Ripper's back? I knowed it would start a big rumpus and maybe help. Gee, lookit, dad," he cried excitedly, "Cougar's licking my arm. He ain't sore a-tall."

Huxley found himself smiling up at Lola. "Remember," she whispered, "I told you dad had helped a dozen small cattlemen over the hump. You'll be the thirteenth. Strictly business, you understand. A loan, at interest."

Looking up into Lola's eyes, aglow with happiness, Huxley felt as though he had known her for years, as though her life had always been entwined with his. So much had happened to them in this one terror-filled night. They had shared the danger, now perhaps they would share the security that was the fruit of that danger. Lola's warm fingers pressing his told him she understood how he felt. It would be grand fun building a new ranch—for a girl like her!

THE END.

THE MAKING OF A BUCKAROO



by

NEY N. GEER

The Making Of A Buckaroo

CHAPTER I

DEATH ON THE RANGE

SPEED SORRELS was crossing Three Forks' wide, dusty street, coming slowly. Potluck Jones watched with more interest than his lean, sun-tanned face suggested. Sorrels, a rawboned, cross-grained man of thirty or thereabouts, was range boss of the Winged V.

Potluck lounged with seeming indolence before the general mercantile store and post office, the points of his shoulder blades against the log wall. Three Forks was a cow town where, to feel comfortable and at ease, a man wanted his back against something thick and solid. Something that would, if necessary, stop a blue whistler.

The mid-afternoon sun slanted under Sorrels' hat, giving his unshaven jaw a bold, aggressive look. A crisp fall wind, breezing down off the Park Range, drifted away the dust agitated by his heavy, oncoming tread. The shadow of his hat brim blocked out his eyes, but Potluck knew them to be steel gray, menacingly cold, and fixed upon himself.

Passing around the hitch pole, Sorrels came in close and paused, scrutinizing Potluck's boyish face and his tall, lean, limber figure. "You still here?" he demanded.

Potluck's generous and friendly mouth smiled easily. It smiled now. "No, amigo, I reckon I must be in Amarillo, Texas. What do you think?"

"I think you'd be in healthier country if you was," Sorrels answered. "You'll find no ridin' job in North Park, if that's what you're really lookin' for, and you been lookin' near two weeks. That's plenty long. Better be driftin', hombre!"

"Reckon I'll do that—after the Double X barbecue," said Potluck mildly. "Couldn't miss that!" he added, his grin widening.

"A heap o' things could happen between now and then," Sorrels said meaningly.

Potluck's brown eyes darkened. "You wouldn't be meanin' somethin' extra special, would you, Sorrels? Like me fallin' off my bronc, maybe, and not bein' able to crawl back on again?"

The Winged V range boss tightened his sardonic lips. Sultry temper was warming up in his steely eyes, but this was not the time. He had given warning. "I reckon you savvy," he said thinly, and passed on inside the store.

Almost at once a girl came out, crossing close before Potluck on her way to the tie pole. She was trim and slender, with golden-blond hair, very easy to look at. She carried several small packages and some mail. Stowing the mail and packages in her saddle pockets, she mounted a fast-looking strawberry roan and dusted out of Three Forks without so much as a glance at Potluck Jones' lounging figure.

POTLUCK heaved a restless sigh. The girl was Virginia Dale, only child of Ivan Dale, owner of the D Bar K, a sizable cow spread on East Fork, over toward the Bow Mountains. Sight of her had caused Potluck to feel a sudden urge to go places and do things—slick down his unruly brown

hair, shine his boots and fork his chestnut gelding.

Rather abstractedly he removed a tinsel-wrapped cigar from the upper left pocket of his vest, while he cast an angling glance across the street toward the barber shop. It was taking his trail mate, Too-bad Tommy O'Neil, a long time to get his red hair shortened. Potluck jingled a spur, looked down at his boots, saw a letter lying there close beside the cigar wrapping. The letter hadn't been there a moment before. No one but Virginia Dale could have dropped it!

Potluck's interest quickened. He gave the street a casual glance, lighted the cigar with all the awkwardness of a cigarette smoker, fumbled the weed and dropped it. When he straightened from picking it up, neither the cigar wrapper nor the letter lay at his feet. He continued to lounge there, smoking and toying idly with the star-spangled wrapper until his cigar ash measured an inch. Then he walked to his horse, mounted, and rode from town.

About three or four miles up the East Fork trail, Potluck overtook Virginia Dale. She was riding slowly. As he drew alongside, she turned and gave him a level glance, her blue eyes not in the least unfriendly.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said Potluck, touching his hat brim. "I reckon you must have dropped this." He unrolled the cigar wrapper and handed her the letter.

Virginia smiled. "You do catch on, don't you?"

"You mean—" Potluck was not a little surprised.

"Of course!" She laughed softly. "I'm not in the habit of dropping mail. I wanted to talk with you. Have you discovered anything as yet?" she asked, her voice confidential.

This was a bracer, an entirely unexpected jolt. But Potluck only grinned, admiring the faint sprinkling of freckles across her nose. "Shore I've discovered something, Miss Virginia," he replied lightly.

"And what's that?" she asked intently.

"That yo're the prettiest gal in this part o' Colorado."

Her cheeks warmed with color and she tried unsuccessfully to frown. Then she smiled impulsively. "Thanks, cowboy!" she murmured.

"Not at all!" said Potluck. "Fact is, I don't reckon I took in enough territory. You ride a pretty hoss, too."

"See here, Mr. Bronc-twister! I wanted to talk, not flirt with you," Virginia informed him. "Please be serious! I know who you are and all about you."

"Then you got me beat," Potluck grinned. "I was picked up as a yearlin' at a dry waterhole, down Arizona way. Folks just figured my name was Jones on account that was printed on the wagon cover. So they called me Potluck Jones. But there's no tellin'; they may have figured wrong, like you're a-figurin' now, maybe." He wasn't tipping his hand just yet.

"And it was Tommy O'Neil's folks who raised you," she said. "Want me to lay my cards on the table? You'll be surprised how much I know. I even recognize the aroma of the governor's cigars."

This was another jolt. Potluck wondered if the whole North Park range had Tommy and himself pegged. "I don't mind ridin' an' listenin' to yore talk. Go ahead,

Miss Virginia." He was becoming a little worried, but he didn't show it, even though he watched the trail ahead and on either side. There was a fresh, raw notch across his chestnut's neck where a mysterious rifle bullet had cut out a tuft of mane, only the day before.

Virginia's blue eyes were approving, and just a shade mischievous. After all, she was taking plenty for granted.

YOU and Too-bad, as you call your friend, spent a week in Denver," she began. "You saw the mint, where they make money; the capitol building, where they make politics; and the bright lights, where they make whoopee—but you didn't get wild and whoop. That's why the governor picked you for this job. Some folks thought you were a little young, but the governor is a cowman. You took his eye. That's why you're here. Right?"

"I like yore voice," smiled Potluck. "You remind me o' a gal I know. Go on, Miss Virginia, I'm listenin'."

"Three years ago," she continued, "Warford Havewell, a Chicago millionaire and friend of the governor, bought the Winged V Ranch on Middle Fork. It was to be sort of a plaything for his son, Leland, who wasn't very strong and needed some outdoor life. Well, he came out. Have you ever watched a gentle saddler when it takes up with the wild bunch?"

"Yeah," said Potluck. "They soon get full o' snorts."

"That's Leland Havewell!" declared the girl. "He's spent enough money to stock the Winged V a dozen times, but all he's got to show for it is a hand-picked crew of gunslingers and rustlers who're robbing him blind, and the rest of us as well. They keep him at least half drunk all the time, slap him on the back, and call him a good fellow. They've got Leland believing everything they tell him."

"Would you be, waal, sort o' interested in this Leland gent?" asked Potluck slowly, watching the girl closely.

"Not that way," Virginia said vehemently. "When I pick a man, he'll have a backbone strung together with a little moral fiber, not a whiskey soak with a bar towel answering for a spinal column. But I am interested in the fact that he's harboring a nest of hard-case desperadoes. We've had a good sheriff killed, and the deputy as well, not to mention a few trusted riders who've very mysteriously quit the country."

"Sounds interesting," said Potluck. He was still not committing himself, much as this girl knew of his business.

Virginia looked steadily at him. "You play 'em close to your vest, don't you, mister?"

"Did you ever notice you got a dimple when you smile?" he answered, grinning.

"Thanks! You've a quick eye for little details, Potluck," Virginia said sweetly. "That's why you spotted Harry Clute, that tinhorn gambler in the Park Saloon, cleverly trimming Leland Havewell in a game of draw poker. You had a run-in with Harry Clute, took Leland to the Winged V to sober him up, but he only cussed you for your trouble, and ran you off. Not that you run easy! You just use good judgment. You don't bluff easy, either. I heard Speed Sorrels try it outside the store," she informed him.

Potluck smiled. "How do you get all yore ideas, and how come you don't keep 'em all in yore pretty little head? If you rattle on like this to every saddle tramp that drifts across this range, some o' 'em may stop here—permanent."

"Now that's not a bit nice," said Virginia. "If I wasn't absolutely sure I have your case history, I wouldn't be riding with you now. It's easy to understand why the governor picked you to straighten out North Park. You have such an open, honest, frank and friendly, decidedly young and innocent—poker face. In the letter he wrote dad, the governor mentioned it cost him twenty-seven dollars and six bits trying to catch you bluffing in a friendly stud game."

"I guess you got my number," said Potluck reluctantly.

THIS girl was going to be a big help, or a big hindrance. At this moment he wasn't sure which. But he liked the girl, and apparently she was worried. She wore a light belt gun and carried a rifle on her saddle. That fact, in itself, was proof enough there was serious trouble on the range.

"What you're really here to do," Virginia told him, "is to get this Leland Havewell straightened out of his kinks. To put it all in a nutshell, make a man of him. Right?"

Potluck nodded.

"Believe me," said the girl seriously, "you've taken on a big job. But I'll help you! That'll make it easier, don't you think?"

"I dunno," Potluck replied honestly. "But at any rate it'll make it a heap more interestin'. I'm beginnin' to think yo're quite a gal, Miss Virginia."

"Thanks again," she smiled. "For that, you can take me to the Double X barbecue. Is it a date?"

"Shore thing," Potluck agreed. "That is, if I'm still feelin' healthy," he added, remembering the bullet notch in his chestnut's neck.

"Here's something else," the girl remarked. "You need a job to make things look right. Come up on the D Bar K and cover the range from our spread. Dad said to tell you. Will you come?"

"Be glad to, Miss Virginia. Only Too-bad and I don't seem popular with the Winged V bunch. Your harborin' us may cause you trouble."

"Then it's settled!" she declared, ignoring the warning. "That's why I rode into Three Forks, to arrange this, without attracting attention."

Potluck drew rein. "Well, so long! Look for us right soon. Reckon I better drift back to town. Too-bad was gettin' a wool clip. No tellin' what he'll be doin' now."

She raised her gloved hand and pointed to where a spur of the Bow Mountains jutted far out, terminating in a long low ridge, over which the trail crossed.

"Ride that far with me, Potluck," she asked frankly. "I want you to meet someone."

"Who?" asked Potluck, beginning to feel edgy. That fringe of timber on the ridge was not to his liking. It could easily screen one rider or a dozen. He began to wonder.

"It's a surprise!" said the girl, her blue eyes bright. "Come on, bronc-twister! I'll race you!" She touched her mount with the spurs.

For an instant Potluck hesitated. Then a sudden wave of recklessness washed away his caution. His chestnut was already on a fidget to be off. He slacked his reins, took up the race. It was a good two-mile stretch, and the girl could cer-

tainly ride. She was well in the lead when her fleet strawberry roan entered the jackpines and cedars. But suddenly she jerked her mount to a sliding halt.

IN a moment Potluck was beside her. She sat rigid, her face colorless; her horrified eyes staring at the body in the trail. Her mount snorted nervously. But Virginia Dale was struck momentarily dumb and speechless.

On the trail was outstretched a dead man, absolutely riddled with lead. Shots that had clearly been drilled into his body after death had claimed him, proof of a vengeful hate.

Flashing keen glances to right and left, Potluck read the mute evidence at hand, picking up the dim trail of three horses leading off in the direction of Middle Fork, the Winged V range. He did not follow the trail far, but turned back and rejoined the girl.

"Well," he said thinly, "I reckon it's a surprise, right enough. Who was he?"

Her voice was steady, even though her words came low as a whisper. "Joel Redsull! A Cattle Association rider—one of the best in the State. He . . . he was waiting . . . wanted to see you. He said he had information you could work out together."

"Tell you anything?"

Her blue eyes were sad. "No, Potluck. Joel was playin' 'em close to his vest, the same as you."

"Ridin' for Speed Sorrels on the Winged V?"

She nodded. "Yes, riding on the Winged V. Potluck, Joel Redsull was a splendid hombre. A real man! He knew he was taking chances. This is the way rustlers pay off! What's to be done about it, Potluck Jones?" She wasn't cracking up, but she was clearly heartsick. A girl with the same kind of rigid backbone she admired in a man.

Potluck answered calmly, yet with grim, determined meaning. "Rustlers get paid in the same coin they give. Lead change! The governor gave me orders to go the limit. I'll find Joel's hoss, then we'll take him to yore D Bar K. I reckon he'll like bein' buried there, Virginia."

CHAPTER II

A CLOSE SHAVE

HARRY CLUTE, the young tinhorn in the Park Saloon, was skilled at stacking the deck and dealing from the bottom. Having watched Speed Sorrels brace Potluck Jones, then observed the latter ride from Three Forks, Clute's pasty face took on a satisfied smile. He believed he had seen the last of Potluck Jones. Nor did Clute's slate-colored eyes miss the sight of Sorrels, departing a short time later. And when three Winged V riders came loping in a little after that, Harry Clute's interest quickened, knowing Tommy O'Neil was still around.

Tying their hard-run mounts, the three riders entered the Park Saloon, where the tricky gambler waited, his active mind having already formed a plan whereby he could turn the situation to his own advantage.

"Hi, fellers!" the gambler hailed the three—Slats, a tall, thin man, Bull, big and ape-faced, and Doodlebug, a chunky, bullet-headed hard case. "Looks like you been riding some. How about a little something to cut the dust?" He motioned to the barkeep, then beckoned toward a secluded table.

The three grinned at Clute. They seemed highly satisfied with themselves and not adverse to partaking of a drink at Harry Clute's expense. The gambler had won plenty of their money. They had a few drinks coming.

Knowing his men, the tinhorn got down to cases without delay. "Gents, your boss just run that limber-legged Association cow detective out of town. Called him, over by the store! The sneak just folded up and quit. Wouldn't draw!"

Slats and Bull exchanged glances. Doodle-bug filled his glass again. "It listens good," commented Slats. "Speed hadn't orter let the nosey skunk get away," said Bull disapprovingly. Doodle-bug seemed to ponder the question.

Harry Clute smiled knowingly. "That's right, Bull! But listen! The little freckle-faced monkey is still here. You'd be doing a good job to gun him off. These Association detectives are getting too thick around here."

The three Winged V riders exchanged glances. "They ain't as thick as they was," said Bull meaningly.

"Harry," said Doodle-bug, "they called you for a card cheat. Why didn't you gun 'em when they busted up yore game with Leland Havewell?"

The gambler smiled. "I'm not a gun-slinger, don't even claim to be. Of course, if you boys are afraid of tying into that little Tommy gent, why, let's skip it. Have another drink!"

"That little gent does look salty," mused Doodle-bug.

"Hell!" scoffed Slats. "He's only a bluff! Never saw a dolled-up clothespin that wasn't. Those fancy shootin' irons don't mean a thing. Who said I was scared o' him?"

"Don't horn in, Slats," said Bull. "I aim to ventilate that little redhead proper. Chew him up and spit him out!" He worked his massive jaws suggestively.

Slats bent across the table, glaring. "You heard me, Bull! I spoke first! I get him!"

"Have another drink," suggested Harry Clute, smiling.

Doodle-bug tapped the table top with his trigger finger. "Don't start a scrap about it, fellers," he snickered. "We'll all three get this little Tommy gent!"

HAVING liberally invested in the barber's full range of tonsorial skill, Tommy O'Neil discovered that his high-peaked sombrero wabbled loosely on his head.

"It's just too bad! You've ruined me," the little blue-eyed Arizona puncher complained, hitching up his silver-conchoed batwing chaps and silver-mounted guns.

"You paid for a haircut, pilgrim," reminded the barber. "I just gave you your money's worth. All you need to make your hat fit is a few lamp wicks under the sweatband. About three, I judge. In a couple weeks, pull out one; couple more weeks, pull out another. Soon as the wicks is all out, come back again. It'll be time for another haircut." The barber looked him over critically. "I did a right good job on you, pilgrim. Your face looks red as a cherry."

"You sure cooked it!" Tommy grinned. "But I'll recommend you to Potluck so you can hot-towel him."

Tommy was nearing the middle of the street before he noticed that

Potluck's chestnut no longer stood at the hitch pole before the store. At once his keen blue eyes took in other details.

Near the hitch rail, where his own big roan stood, Slats had posted himself. Bull lounged in front of the harness shop, and Doodle-bug waited near the Park Saloon. The three had him bracketed between them from both sides of the street. They had him trapped! Grinning wolfishly, they eyed him. This cow detective wasn't going to get away.

Tommy came to a dead stop, hitching up his wide belt. His blue eyes kindled with a devil-may-care light. Slowly he turned his head and marked each man in his place. Then he rolled a spur rowel through the dust and pivoted on his high heels.

Doodle-bug laughed out loud. It was a signal for the three to draw. There followed a blur of movement. Out in the middle of the street, Tommy snapped his guns from leather in what seemed almost a careless gesture. His gun muzzles flicked to right and left. Spat fire! His left-hand gun kicked high with recoil; his right seemed to buck under his left armpit and explode of its own accord. Horses snorted and lunged to the blasting shots.

Slats, thin as a whip, seemed to have come unpinned in the middle. Bull's ape face was twisted. His massive jaws gaped open as he bent at the knees. Doodle-bug had caught the shot Tommy had thrown under his arm. He was shocked, bewildered, but trying to get his gun in line. Tommy triggered a fourth shot, his .45 slug smashing Doodle-bug's gun from his hand. Doodle-bug went down slowly, fighting to keep his feet.

Bareheaded, his red hair glinting in the sunlight, Too-bad Tommy O'Neil eyed the empty street, first one way, then the other. Just where the Winged V lead had flown, he didn't know or care. He wasn't hit. But the Winged V cook was going to have three less to feed.

Above the swing doors of the Park Saloon, Tommy saw Harry Clute's pasty face, registering awed amazement. The Colt in Tommy's left hand pin-wheeled on his trigger finger, then blasted a blue whistler through the high crown of the tinhorn's pearl-gray Stetson. Clute gasped, fell over backward, scrambled away to the rear of the saloon like a rabbit hunting cover. Tommy grinned, his head cocked to one side.

The friendly barber stood in his doorway, watching. Tommy waggled a gun at him. "Keep yore towels hot, amigo," he grinned. "'Cause I'll be seein' you." And picking up his high-peaked hat, moved toward his waiting roan, with just a little swagger in his rolling gait.

CHAPTER III

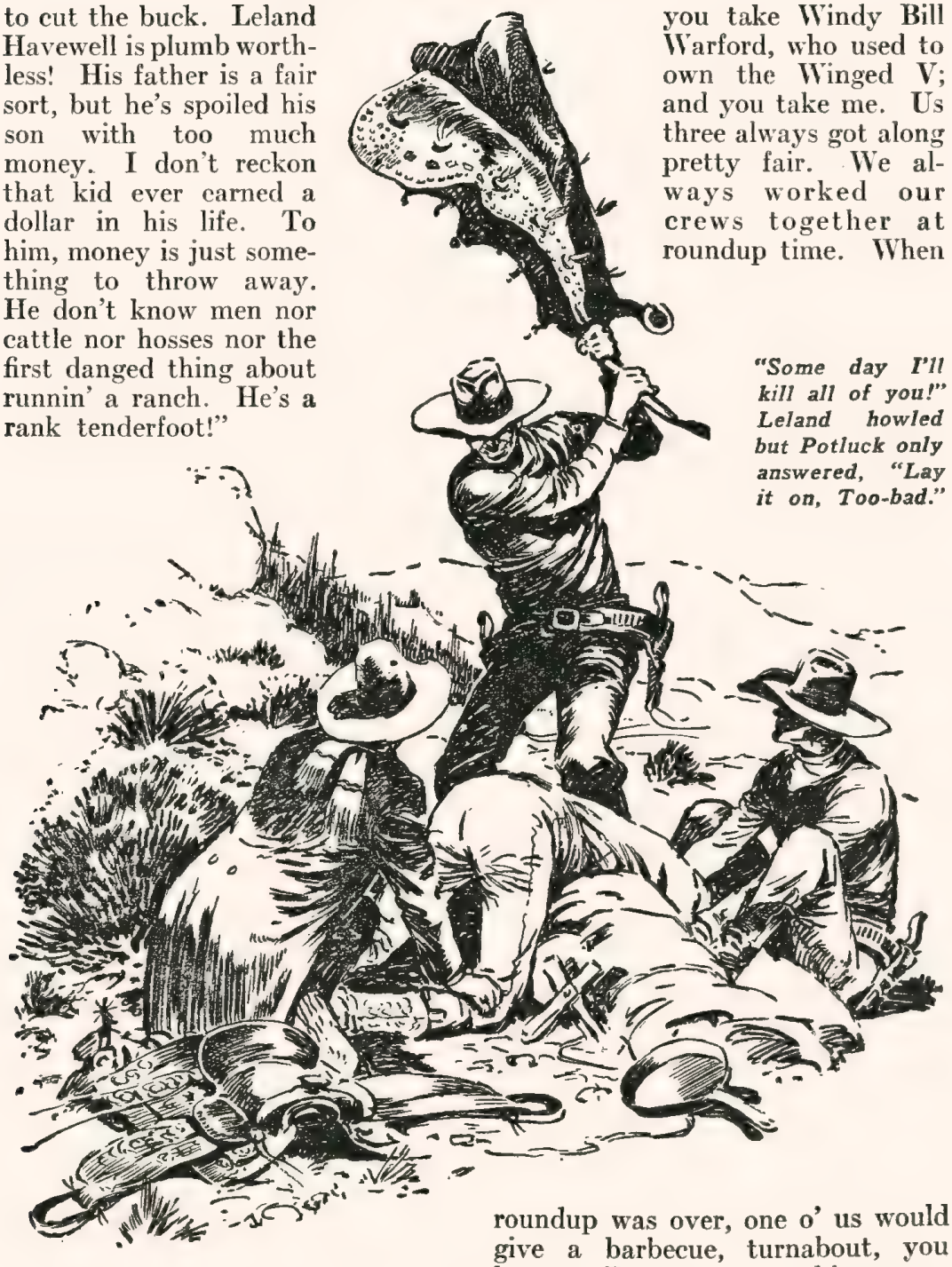
WAR CLOUDS

JOEL REDSULL'S bullet-riddled body was laid at rest upon a little knoll behind the D Bar K ranchhouse in a little grove where several other rough headstones kept it company. That thought was in Potluck's mind as he sat on the porch watching the afterglow of the sun, flooding the western sky with crimson and gold from behind the high Park Range.

Virginia sat near, quiet for the most part. Her father, a likable man with a thoughtful face, was talking, his voice even and mild.

"You look plenty young, Potluck," said Ivan Dale. "The governor gave you a tough job. To be honest, I don't see how you aim

to cut the buck. Leland Havewell is plumb worthless! His father is a fair sort, but he's spoiled his son with too much money. I don't reckon that kid ever earned a dollar in his life. To him, money is just something to throw away. He don't know men nor cattle nor hosses nor the first danged thing about runnin' a ranch. He's a rank tenderfoot!"



"Some day I'll kill all of you!" Leland howled but Potluck only answered, "Lay it on, Too-bad."

"Yeah, I reckon," Potluck replied, remembering his own raising on the O'Neils' hard-scrubble cattle spread.

"Now you take Cleve Crouse," Dale continued. "Crouse owns the Double X over on West Fork; and you take Windy Bill Warford, who used to own the Winged V; and you take me. Us three always got along pretty fair. We always worked our crews together at roundup time. When roundup was over, one o' us would give a barbecue, turnabout, you know. But soon as this young squirt o' an Easterner sat down on Middle Fork, smack dab between Crouse and me, hell just naturally began to cook. The kid thinks that because he's got money, he owns the hull danged country. He ain't dry

behind the ears. But he thinks he's hell on wheels!"

"Maybe a few good dustings with a green willow would have helped make a man of him," said Potluck, recalling a few such painful incidents in his own life.

"If you could get that yahoo sobered up," went on the owner of the D Bar K, "you might talk some sense into his head, before someone shoots it off. But I doubt it! In the first place his crew o' gun fighters keep everyone away from him. Leland is their meat, and they aim to pick him clean. They got him bamboozled into believin' his neighbors is all rustlers and hoss thieves o' the lowest order, and it's just the other way around.

"Crouse and me tried to put him straight about the men he hires, especially Speed Sorrels, who's a bad man with a record. But that young squirt wouldn't listen. He shot off his mouth at us in a way that near warmed me up to the point o' puttin' a streak o' daylight through his wishbone. And I'm plenty even-tempered, lad! He rides a little, and packs a gun. The easiest way would be to call him, then ventilate him when he draws."

"No, that would be too easy," said Potluck. "The governor is a right good friend o' Leland's dad, and he figures the boy'll make a tolerable citizen if and when he comes out o' his kinks. Me and Tommy aim to unkink him."

"Maybe," suggested Virginia, "if you could get him over here on the D Bar K we could sober him up."

POTLUCK shook his head. He wanted to get Leland Havewell sobered up, but to bring him here would start a range war. In fact, seeing the way Joel Redsull had been murdered, it looked like a range war had already started. He and Tommy had been sent here to prevent that very thing. They were going to have to work fast.

The afterglow was fading. Dusk began laying its shadow over the East Fork valley, obscuring the wide cut meadows, where long, high haystacks appeared to float in a sea of purple mist. Then out of it came the throbbing tempo of a running horse, bringing a rider up the rising slope to the ranchhouse yard.

"It's Cleve Crouse!" exclaimed Ivan Dale springing up from his chair. "Lookit the way his arm's flopping. He's been winged!"

The owner of the Double X was a wiry, active-looking man. He pulled up close and short, the sliding hoofs of his lathered mount spraying gravel on the porch. He slid off, his grizzled mustache bristling with anger.

"Damn that Winged V spread!" he exploded. "Dale, get yore riders together, we'll clean it out! I just got back from summer range. Found a rider up there! Been killed four, five days or better. An' just now, cuttin' across Winged V range, one of them murderin' hellions took a pot shot at me. By hell—" He paused, caught himself. "Beg pardon, Miss Virginia! Didn't see you had company. Reckon I'm pretty riled up."

"It's all right, Cleve," the girl said quickly. "This is Potluck Jones, our kind of hombre. Come inside and I'll fix up that arm."

Cleve Crouse looked Potluck up and down, then nodded, offering his left hand. Two punchers had come up from the bunkhouse. One carried a rifle cradled on his arm. Trouble was building up quickly, Potluck knew. Stimulated by his

talk with Virginia and her father, a plan was forming in his mind. It was time to act!

Again there came the drumming of hoofs rolling up through the still air of the valley. The sound struck a familiar note in Potluck's attentive ears. He judged it to be the racing stride of Tommy O'Neil's big roan. The unarmed puncher ran to the bunkhouse, quickly reappearing with a second rifle. Potluck left the porch, stepped out into the open.

"It's okay," he called. "My partner, I reckon."

They all waited behind, silent, tense with excitement.

THE oncoming rider pulled up at a distance, hailed the ranch. Potluck whistled through his teeth. It was the signal he and Tommy always used. Tommy rode in slowly, stopped close, swung a leg up around his saddlehorn, eying Potluck in the dusk.

"So here yuh be," grumbled Tommy. "Tryin' to give me the slip?"

"Shucks!" said Potluck. "Too-bad, I didn't aim to be gone from Three Forks more'n an hour, at most. It was like this." And he quickly explained meeting Virginia and finding Joel Redsull's body in the trail. "I'm glad yo're here, amigo!" he finished. "Things have begun to pop. In the mornin' we'll pick up that trail where Redsull was murdered and follow it. I reckon it'll lead us to the Winged V."

"That trail don't lead to the Winged V," said Tommy with a show of indifference.

"How do you know?" Potluck demanded.

"Don't you reckon I got eyes?" said Tommy. "I followed yore tracks out o' town. Saw where two pair o' hoss tracks trailed together, right close and friendlylike. I wasn't surprised at that. But when I come to blood in the trail, I got curious. I knew it wasn't you, on account they weren't yore boot tracks. Anyway I read the sign and trailed them three jiggers right back into Three Forks, by way o' Middle Fork."

"Then what happened?" asked Potluck, knowing his friend's quick-trigger work.

"Why nothin' happened then," stated Tommy. "Only it was gettin' time to feed, so I et. And then I had my hair cut."

"You didn't see those three coyotes?" Potluck insisted.

"Shore I saw 'em!" declared Tommy, seemingly getting out of patience. "They was all three daid! They'd been shot already. Wasn't that just too bad?"

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated Cleve Crouse.

"It's a fact!" Tommy assured him.

"Who shot 'em?" demanded Ivan Dale.

" 'Twas me plugged 'em," said Tommy O'Neil mildly, scratching a match on the sole of his high-heeled boot.

"Shucks!" said Potluck. "It don't make sense!"

"No, it don't!" confirmed a D Bar K puncher.

"That's a fact," agreed Tommy readily. "It took me some time to figure it out. But you see, those three same jiggers had jumped me as I was quittin' the barber shop. Them three all drawin' on me suddenlike, and my mind bein' sort o' preoccupied, I just naturally drilled 'em all before I thought. It was just too bad!"

Cleve Crouse smiled, forgetful of

his wounded arm. "I'll lay a bet that was the quickest justice that was ever measured out in this here county! Who were the skunks?"

Tommy grinned. "The gent as cuts their hair says they answer to Slats, Bull, and Doodle-bug."

"The Winged V bunch! Part o' Speed Sorrels' gang!" declared Ivan Dale. "Lad, you shore done a good job!"

"Waal," grumbled Tommy, "I'm gettin' tired o' sittin' here. Ain't someone goin' to ask me to light?"

"Step down and rest your saddle," invited Virginia. "You've found another home!"

"Yeah, but we won't be here long," said Potluck. "We're headin' for the Winged V!"

"When do we start?" asked Tommy. "I'm ready now!"

"Dale," said Cleve Crouse, "what I'm here to tell yuh is I've a hunch there's a rustlin' drive on. I'm short beef on the summer range!"

"Don't get in a sweat," cautioned Potluck. "Just go ahead with yore roundup. Tommy an' me'll bring yore beef back. What I need is a right good buckin' hoss to take along. We'll be back in time for the barbecue, shore. I got a date for that."

"There ain't goin' to be no barbecue!" Cleve Crouse stated. "I've called it off! What with this and that, I don't reckon I'll risk it. Like as not there'd be shootin'."

"Maybe so," mused Potluck. "But I'll tell you what; we'll give that barbecue on the Winged V spread. I'll go talk with Leland Havewell. It's high time that wild son was gettin' neighborly."

"Are you loco?" gasped Virginia.

"Maybe," smiled Potluck Jones. "But don't forget we got a date." And he turned away.

CHAPTER IV

"KIDNAPERS"

UNDER the vague starlight, the Winged V ranch buildings loomed up large and sinister. The great hip-roofed barn and oversized frame house were monuments to a small fortune buried beyond recall—ample proof that Leland Havewell was a spendthrift and a fool. Midnight was not far off, yet lights still burned, Potluck observed.

Riding slowly across well-sodded hay meadows, he and Tommy drew near, two happy-go-lucky cowboys who knew the ways of danger. Tying their string of horses at a stackyard fence, they advanced on foot. Tommy's short legs had to take two steps to Potluck's one.

"Yuh got a good idea—if it works," muttered Tommy.

"It's gotta work," replied Potluck quietly. "Can you keep in mind the house plans Virginia sketched for us?"

"Yeah. It looks like those lights is burnin' in Leland's so-called 'recreation' room. Potluck, don't you reckon we're ridin' our luck pretty hard?"

"Don't get spooked, Too-bad," Potluck cautioned. "An' whatever happens, don't forget yoreself and put a slug in this wild son we're after. But if you bump into Speed Sorrels, that hombre is bad medicine. There's a light in the bunkhouse. We'll look that over first."

The large, ultramodern bunkhouse was unoccupied at the moment, they discovered. Tommy viewed the interior with interest. "Coiled springs, lockers, and individual mirrors," he said, awed. "This Winged V bunch shore beds down in clover."

"Come on," instructed Potluck, turning toward the house. "You take the back door, I'll take the front. We'll close in on that room where the lights are. Take it slow and easy. The main idea is to take 'em by surprise."

The cause of all this trouble sat in a five-handed draw-poker game. His young face was whiskey-flushed, his hands unsteady, and his wide slack mouth sagging at the corners. As usual, Leland Havewell's luck was bad. But he was in a very mellow condition, and didn't seem to mind in the least the way the cards were running against him. Each time he lost a pot, Harry Clute, the pasty-faced tinhorn, called Leland a good fellow, a dead-game sport, or said: "Next hand you'll trim us, old son!"

"Ash all right," Leland would reply. Then the Winged V cook would pour another drink, and the two hard-case Winged V riders would exchange looks and grin, being a little ahead of the game.

It was Harry Clute's turn to deal, and he was expertly stacking the deck. His expensive Stetson, now bullet ventilated, shaded his sallow face. He had decided Three Forks was getting too warm for him, and had taken cover here at the Winged V, having a good excuse for coming, since he brought word of the sudden demise of Slats, Bull, and Doodle-bug. He was pleased with the thought that his stay here would be both pleasant and profitable.

The tinhorn's skilled hands worked easily and swiftly, manipulating the cards with a cleverness that escaped the eye. Suddenly Clute's hands paused and began to tremble, and the cards trickled from his fingers. He straightened in his chair, sat rigid, and frozen, his slate-colored eyes widening with fear.

The Winged V cook, seeing the gambler's face, stiffened and turned his head. The two hard-case riders kicked back their chairs, sprang up, reaching for their guns.

"Don't draw!" shrieked the tinhorn. "Don't draw! It's him!" His gaze was riveted upon Tommy, who had a gun in either hand.

"Whash a matter?" queried Leland Havewell thickly, his whiskey-reddened eyes peering through a liquor haze. Presently he made out Potluck Jones framed in the door at the tinhorn's back. "So ish you, ish it?" he remarked with attempted dignity. "D-didn't I give you ordersh to sh-tay off my property?"

"Where's Speed Sorrels?" demanded Potluck, his dark eyes sharp upon the cook and riders, who were slowly raising their empty hands, vividly remembering the news Harry Clute had brought.

"That's for you to worry about," snarled one of the hard-cases. "Sorrels will get you for this!"

STEPPING into the richly furnished room, Potluck disarmed the two riders and the cook. Leland Havewell, too drunk to know what it was all about, staggered to his feet and tried to draw. Potluck gripped his wrist, twisted his hand away before his gun was out of leather. Then he disarmed him. While this was going on, Tommy, a satisfied grin on his freckled face, kept the others covered.

Leland began to curse, something he had learned quite well. His talk was thick, but well to the point. Potluck slapped his face. Leland was a big, husky-looking chap, but he packed about thirty pounds excess weight. Angrily, he made a

Continued on page 108

In her husband's absence, the pioneer woman stood as ready and as able as any man to defend her home and her children.

The Story of the West

Told in pictures and text by

GERARD DELANO

WHILE many a daring pioneer was pushing our Western frontier ever farther into the wilds, while the free trader and trapper and other trail breakers sought new and more fertile fields, and while St. Louis was rapidly growing in population and reputation as the country's great fur center, the pioneer women, ever the courageous helpmates of their men, were bravely playing their important part in the vast drama which constitutes the story of the West.

Outside the immediate vicinity of St. Louis the bulk of the Missouri Territory was still a wilderness marked only here and there by the little cabin and partially cleared ground of some hardy settler.

While her man was away on the far-flung errands or projects of those early days, many a gallant woman reared her little brood, the Kit Carsons and Jim Bridgers of the next generation of Western heroes.

Amid this rude environment, surrounded by the hidden menace of the forest, by howling wolves, screeching "painters," lumbering bears, and marauding Indians, she calmly and with never a thought of her own heroism, "kept the home fires burning."

She turned the hogs and cattle out to forage, occasionally bringing them in from far afield for earmarking. She tended, milked and guarded the one precious milk cow. In season she gathered the "summer" and "winter" grape, the persimmon and the pawpaw, the wild strawberry, the pecan, hickory and walnut. She gathered, hauled and split wood, carried water in heavy wooden buckets from the nearest spring, cooked and put up quantities of preserves for use during the long winter, and in the flickering flare of a tallow candle she spun cloth, made, mended, and patched the rough clothing which her family wore.

A homely but a brave part she played in the winning of the West, and one that often called for all the courage and foresight she possessed. This was partially Osage country, and the Osages, while nominally at peace with the whites at this time, were given to occasional plundering expeditions against the unprotected settlers.

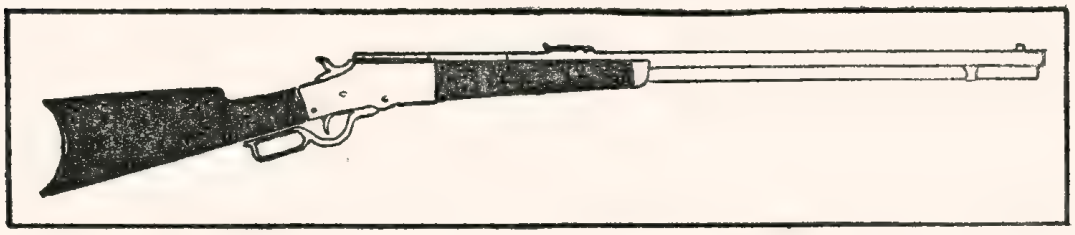
Many cattle and hogs found their way to the rush-covered oblong lodges of the Osages, and many times, too, the sinister shadows of the black-faced riders—it was the peculiar custom of the Osages to blacken the lower half of their faces and cry out before robbing a settler's home, "because," they said, "they felt so sorry for their proposed victims"—fell across the open doorway of some lonely pioneer home.

The little cabin was then ransacked for anything of real or fancied value and the larder raided. Nor did the looting redskins hesitate to heap indignities upon the woman of the house, if she were found alone. When they finished their plundering, the cabin and outbuildings were left a mass of seething flames while the helpless occupants were destitute and homeless.

But many a pioneer woman, unprotected in her husband's absence, stood as ready and able as any man to defend her home and her children. On the appearance of a plundering party of red robbers, she would snatch the ever-ready, long-barreled rifle from its pegs on the clay-daubed walls, and, with her little ones clinging to her skirts, she would stand off the weird, shaven-headed, crested savages, and make it *stick!*

NEXT WEEK: INSURRECTION IN TEXAS

The Bullard Rifle



By PHIL SHARPE

World Famed Authority On Firearms

ONE of the rifles making its appearance during the latter part of the nineteenth century was the famous Bullard. Today this is a much misunderstood firearm. It never approached the popularity of the Ballard, and many writers speak of Bullard and Ballard in the same breath, thus giving the impression that these guns were one and the same.

The Bullard rifle was essentially a repeater. Some Bullard models were made as single shots, but the Bullard is generally known as a lever-action type of repeater of the same general appearance as the Winchester. All Ballard rifles were single-shot numbers.

Bullard rifles were manufactured by Bullard Repeating Arms Co., of Springfield, Massachusetts, beginning about 1887. Repeating rifles were built for target purposes, but were used chiefly for hunting.

An original catalog in my files indicates that a single-shot number was also made, with a rolling block action similar to the old Remington, but having a finger lever similar to the repeater. Operation of the finger lever rolled the breech block downward and backward. These were made in all calibers from the .22 short to the big .50/115 Bullard, a special cartridge believed to have been adapted to no rifle other than the Bullard repeater.

An interesting thing about the repeating action was its unique design, carrying the breech block to the rear through operation of the finger lever by means of a rack-and-pinion device, thus becoming self-locking and absolutely positive, not dependent upon springs. It was impossible to discharge this gun with the action partly closed as the hammer could not contact the firing pin until the action was closed and locked.

The claims made by the manufacturers of the Bullard repeating rifle caused it to be widely used throughout the West for hunting purposes, particularly the hunting of big game. They insisted that this repeater could be fired with greater rapidity than any other, due to the fact that it worked more easily and smoothly because of the gearing of the finger lever to the breech block, thus extracting tight shells without difficulty.

Bullard's 1887 catalog states that this rifle could be fired ten times in five seconds, using heavy full charge

.45/70 military cartridges. It also states that on a previous test record under official supervision, only eleven shots had been fired with another action in seven seconds.

One of the reasons why the Bullard appeared popular throughout the West was its ease in loading on horseback. The rifle could be loaded as a single loader from the top of the receiver with the muzzle safely pointed down or could be rolled over and loaded from the bottom into the magazine to keep this properly filled.

Early American cartridges, when first making their appearances in center-fire variety, were built very similar to the rim-fire numbers in general appearance, having a primer inside the case and held in position by deep crimps on the side of the case approximately a quarter of an inch from the head. These cartridges, due to the lack of reinforcement at the head, would expand badly on being fired and frequently gave extraction problems in the large calibers in the average actions.

Bullard claimed that at the time this gun made its appearance, it was the only lever action repeater which would successfully use the .45/70 *copper* cartridge having a folded head.

TODAY Bullard rifles are quite rare, but many of them are still in active service as hunting guns. They stood up well because they were made of the best materials available in those days, no iron being used in the works. All parts of the receivers were forged steel, with the exception of the carriers elevating the cartridge from the tubular magazine beneath the barrel to a point where the breech bolt would carry it into the chamber. This was made of special cast alloy.

Like all other guns of the past, enormous claims were made by the manufacturers concerning the superiority of their product. Some of these are unreasonable and account for much of the misunderstanding today. At other times manufacturers stated the results of definite tests which give more practical information.

This 1887 catalog shows the results of a test of the standard .45/70/405 government cartridge using a 70-grain charge of black powder. This was tested at a range of three hundred yards from the muzzle of the gun.

Bullard rifles were not all alike. There were different sizes, depending, of course, upon the caliber. The standard sporting rifle as sold in the late 1880s was furnished in .32/40/150 and .38/45/190, two special Bullard calibers of bottle-neck variety. In all of these old-time numbers, the first group of figures indicates the caliber, the second indicates the weight of the powder charge of black powder, and the third, the weight of the bullet. The weights are in grains.

This standard rifle had a twenty-six-inch round barrel with a straight grip and plain walnut forearm. Both grip and forearm were checked and the gun was furnished either with full or half magazines. The full magazine number was the most popular throughout the West and had a capacity of eleven shots. Weight ran between eight and eight and one half pounds. The 1888 price was thirty-three dollars.

Although not widely used for target shooting, Bullard recommended both of these cartridges as being exceedingly accurate at two hundred yards.

The heavy-framed Bullard had a larger barrel, stock and magazine, and was chambered for the .40/75/258 Bullard, the .45/85/290, the .40/90/300, and the .45/70/405.

The special Bullard .40/75/258 would also shoot the .40/60/260. This was about the same cartridge except for weight of powder and bullet. This particular number differed from others in that it was more or less of a straight-tapered, stubby cartridge instead of the customary bottle-neck type in the regular Bullard series. General specifications of this heavy-framed job were about the same as those for the standard sporting number except that the weight ran between ten and ten and one-half pounds.

The .40/90 Bullard cartridge was more popular in the West than any other.

Bullard also manufactured a few de luxe numbers which were listed as their "Express Rifles." This type had an even larger frame than the heavy model and all catalog data stated "Made to order only." It took a .50/95/300 Winchester Express cartridge, used in a great many other rifles at that time.

THE most powerful number in the entire Bullard line was the .50/115 using a 306-grain solid lead bullet and a 300-grain hollow point. This hollow-point number was filled with a copper cup, seated flush with the flat nose of the bullet to keep out dirt as well as the wind while in flight and permit the bullet to expand easily on impact.

This .50/115 cartridge is extremely rare today, although it was manufactured in huge quantities by all ammunition makers up to about the beginning of the World War. The rifle for this sold for forty-five dollars and the ammunition was much more expensive than other ammunition of that day.

This .50/115 deserves its place in the sun. It was the first American cartridge of the semirimless variety appearing as a rimless number. At that time no rimless cartridges had appeared on the American market. It also was the first American cartridge to have a true solid head or thick brass base. These things greatly affected the expense of manufacture and thus undoubtedly accounted for the tremendously high price of the ammunition.

Many Bullard rifles of military style turn up throughout the West. This military version was never an official army model but was widely sold to national-guard units, private volunteers and other organizations. For the most part it was chambered for the .45/70 Government cartridge. As a military gun, it was turned out both in rifle and carbine style. The rifle was equipped with a bayonet and weighed eight pounds, eight ounces, not including bayonet, and the carbine with its 26-inch barrel weighed eight pounds. A similar carbine was turned out with a twenty-four-inch barrel weighing seven and one-half pounds and grew popular as a saddle gun.

The Bullard did its bit in the formation of this country's history. Firearms have always been standard equipment among true Americans and it is unfortunate that some of these old makes did not continue in manufacture. But gun makers, like other humans, live only to die.

In a forthcoming issue Mr. Sharpe will describe the history of Remington, the oldest rifle maker in this country, now nearly one and a quarter centuries old.

CUNNING OF THE DAMNED

By KENNETH GILBERT

Cunning Of The Damned

SO soothing was the gentle warmth of the chinook wind that the frozen hearts of the mountains were touched, and they wept copious tears —rivulets of snow water that ran down their slopes and turned even the smallest creeks into raging torrents. Overnight the wild valleys of the upper Ohanepecosh became watery death traps that took heavy toll of forest creatures as well as herds of stock which had been wintered in those sheltered reaches. Balmy with spring though the air might be, it was freighted with the hint of death that carried everywhere among the wild kindred.

Only those grim ghouls that come in the wake of disaster—the prowling wolves and coyotes, and the buzzards wheeling in the soft blue sky—would thrive and fatten when nature relaxed her stern mood in the high country.

Even old Makoos, the red fox, which had her den in a sandy bank along the Ohanepecosh, was troubled as she returned at dawn from the night's hunting. She sensed that the rising tumult of the tumbling waters meant hazard, and she had cut short her quest for food in order that she might make certain nothing had happened to her little family. Her mate had vanished a week before, probably killed by the hounds of the bounty hunters who were out in the thawing snows in search of bobcats and other furred marauders which preyed on the flocks. Since then she had carried the double task of feeding herself as well as her babies. So persistently had she hunted that now small game was scarce near her den and she was compelled to travel far.

But the other predators were even more thorough than she and it seemed that not so much as a brush rabbit was left. In the mild dawn that made the drenched valleys smoky with fog, she came hurrying back to her home, worried by the realization that she had left her little ones unguarded so long. Weak from hunger and the double drain on her vitality, she moved through the thickets with brushy tail drooped abjectly, her thin body hunched as though cowering under the lash of misfortune.

Near starvation though Makoos might be, the spark of life still glowed within her, kept alive by the mother instinct which admits no defeat. For in that sandy burrow by the river a miracle had occurred, and although the old vixen had mothered many fox pups, never had the like of this happened to her before.

Two of the pups—her litters were growing smaller every year—were red fox images of their mother, but the third was that rare color phase which occurs in the vulpine clan, a silver black. Makoos had been blessed by royalty, and realization of its importance made her more anxious than ever that nothing should happen to this most precious baby of all.

Reaching the river at last, she took a last look over her shoulder to make sure that she was not being followed, then vanished behind a log, and the next moment was threading the winding bore of her tunnel. Even before she reached the snug chamber where she had left the sightless pups, she knew that disaster had struck in her absence.

It was not alone the faint, mewling sound which came to her, but the fact that several inches of water

stood in the burrow. While she had been gone the rising river had filtered through the sand, and the tunnel was rapidly filling with water. Anxiously she splashed through it and her night-seeing, catlike eyes as well as her sensitive nose explored the scene.

Two of the pups—the red ones—lay limp and cold in the water. She touched the pitiful little bodies unbelievingly with her nose, nudging them, hoping to stir them into life, but it became plain at once that they were dead. Yet the third, the precious silver black, stirred in the water, wailing of his discomfort.

Gratefully Makoos made an encouraging sound deep in her throat, and as he heard her the pup set up louder cries, and his thin, reedy plaints touched her mother heart. She picked him up deftly by the loose skin of his neck and began backing out of the place.

Once outside she laid him carefully on the ground, and her soft tongue caressed him as she cleaned his silky fur, which was muddy and dripping. This done she bethought herself of the other pups and made two more trips to bring them out. For several minutes she worked over them, striving to restore life in their tiny bodies, but the crying of the silver black made her leave off at last.

When she had fed him and warmed him in the curves of her lean body, old Makoos looked around worriedly as though debating what to do. Of a sudden the world had become a place filled with fresh dangers. Until she found a new den where she could hide the homeless pup, she would have to guard him constantly. Hunger gnawed at her empty vitals, but his safety came first. She was in the act of picking him up and starting off on a wandering search for another burrow when there came to her delicate ears the faint sound of a distant, musical chiming.

The sound had instantaneous, alarming effect. Makoos cowered, whimpering, and her eyes glowed greenish with fear. Gifted with wisdom as old Makoos was, she knew the meaning of that call, for many times she had been compelled to circle and confuse her trail when the hounds of the bounty hunters were abroad.

It was true that they seldom bothered with her, for their quarry was bobcats or coyotes, but they would not hesitate to take her trail if it was fresh. Hampered as she was now with the helpless pup, it would be difficult to keep ahead of the pack. Yet if she could find some unused den in which to hide the youngster, she might pit her craft successfully against them.

There was no time to be lost, for the direction from which the baying came told her that the hounds were either on her track or that of some other creature whose trail paralleled hers. She caught up the little silver black once more and began moving swiftly along the river.

By and by she stopped as she caught sight of a number of holes burrowed into the hillside. It looked like the sanctuary she was after, and she started down the main tunnel. But hardly had she entered when there was a chirring snarl of warning, and Makoos stopped, then backed away. The old boar badger who had dug that burrow was telling her unmistakably that she was unwelcome.

Outside again she listened for the hounds, and it seemed to her that they were closer. Still carrying the limp pup she fled soundlessly through the brush.

At the end of a quarter of a mile she was compelled to stop and rest, for in her weakened condition she had little stamina. Tenderly she put the pup on the ground and lay down beside him. She did her best to feed him, but he fretted and complained over the meager rations. She lay there as long as she dared, hearing the clangor of the hounds grow louder. There was no doubt now that they were on her track. Presently, in fresh panic she caught up her baby and resumed flight.

She ran until her breath came in tearing gasps through her clenched teeth. A plan of escape grew more definitely in her mind. Just ahead was a shallow stream which she could wade up or down, and by the time the hounds puzzled out her trail she would be far away and safe. A little way farther and she would make it.

But as she topped a low hogback, beyond which the creek lay, she came to the stunning realization that the land was in the grip of the flood, something she had forgotten.

What had been the shallow creek now was a roaring torrent, wide and deep. It flowed with such terrific force that she could not have swum it even if she were not hampered by the pup. Staggering with weariness and a sudden, hopeless feeling that she was trapped, Makoos paused as she fought against panic.

Behind her the baying of the hounds had changed to an eager note, and she knew they were taking her hot trail at top speed. The pup squirmed and whimpered as it dangled from her jaws. She would liked to put it down and mother it, but growing fear drove thought of everything save preservation for the pup and herself, from her mind.

She stiffened in dread anticipation as she marked the leader of the pack, a tall liver-and-white dog, break from cover a hundred yards away and come bellowing on, taking her scent out of the air instead of from the ground. His baying echoed through the woods above the steady whispering of the flood waters like a chant of doom.

Terror-stricken, Makoos raced away again at top speed despite the fact that she had been almost exhausted a few moments before. From some unknown source within her she had tapped a new reserve of strength, but it would be her last. When she stopped once more, not even the certainty of death could force her undernourished muscles to drive her ahead.

Even as she summoned new powers to her aid, her cunning brain stirred with fresh wisdom. Perhaps out of the depth of her recollection a plan took shape. The heritage of many generations of foxes who had survived only because they were able to out-think pursuers, came to her aid.

For she swung aside from the flooded stream, putting herself almost at right angles to the racing hounds and the big leader who was running well ahead of them. She was coming now to a region which she had avoided in the past because instinct told her it was dangerous. Ahead were yawning sandpits, some twenty or thirty feet deep, whose sides could not be scaled by any creature that fell in them, for the loose sand would keep sliding back as rapidly as it could be climbed.

Makoos knew about those pits because she had seen deer and even rabbits trapped in the bottom of them. Without understanding why, she knew they were death traps. Probably it was beyond her comprehension to realize that these pits were indirectly the work of man.

She could not have known that the hillside was honeycombed with the shafts of an old mine which had been flooded out and permitted to cave-in from the surface above. But instinctively she knew that what meant danger for herself likewise meant danger for the dogs, and if she were crafty enough she might turn the circumstance into safety for the pup and herself.

Almost deliberately she paused where the dogs could see her for a moment just at the edge of brush which screened one of the deepest pits, a wide hole with several feet of water at the bottom. Then she vanished.

Probably the leader of the pack knew she was at the end of the chase, for at sight of her his bawling changed to sharp, chopping yelps of recognition. The other dogs caught the meaning of the signal and came up swiftly. In mad ecstasy that the kill was so close the leader crashed through the brush and two of the other dogs followed. But the remaining three swung aside just in time.

From below came the frantic yelping of the trapped hounds as they sought to climb the loose, slipping sand. They would get nearly halfway to the rim before they would start sliding back. Presently they broke into a doleful wailing, and the three survivors sat on haunches and joined them.

From far in the rear came two shots, a signal of encouragement that the trapped dogs had been heard. It would take time and effort for the bounty hunters to rescue the dogs, at some risk to the men themselves.

As though she understood this, Makoos went on more slowly. She was near the limit of her strength, yet she believed her ruse had been successful, and that she had rid herself of the hounds.

Yet a few minutes later Makoos heard that dread clangor break out once more. Evidently the survivors had picked up her trail and, disregarding their trapped fellows, had resumed the chase. In full cry they came on.

Makoos weaved drunkenly on her feet and was compelled to put down the pup at last, while she drew gulps of air into her tortured lungs. The little one was mewling plaintively at the rough treatment he had received and he was hungry. But there was no time to stop and console him now. Makoos had to drive on with the last bit of strength in her body.

But the drama was moving to a swift and tragic climax. The hounds seemed tireless despite their long run. Makoos could go but a little way farther. Oddly enough, it seemed that fate had staged the finale not far from where it began.

True to her characteristics, Makoos had been swinging in a great circle. Likewise she had been further turned aside by the swollen creek. Now she was back within a few hundred yards from her flooded den.

No sanctuary awaited her there and she avoided the place. But she did remember what might be a haven now, even though it was to be considered only as a last resort. No friendly hiding-place remained. In her desperation she would attempt to share refuge with an old enemy.

She knew the spot, and such was her abhorrence that she approached it warily, as though half suspecting her old foe might be waiting in ambush for her. But he was nowhere in sight. At the mouth of a burrow so small that she could barely squeeze into it, and about which were littered a few feathers and well-

gnawed bones, she hesitated a moment, then crept softly inside.

The rankness of the smell within offended her nostrils, and Makoos was not particularly squeamish about smells. No fox is, for that matter. Her hope now was that the place was empty. Hardly making a sound, she forced her lank body deeper and deeper underground.

Down in this dark tunnel all was quiet and peaceful. The clamor of the dogs now came to her only as a faint murmur. It would take a long time for the dogs to dig her and her pup out of the earth, if they could do it at all. She and the tiny silver black were safe, and when the dogs gave up at last, which they must do, she believed, she would take the pup and seek out a new land free from floods and other dangers.

As she moved on, a current of cold air stroked her nose, and she realized that there were two entrances to this burrow—one at the back for escape, if needed. Relieved by that discovery she went ahead.

Now the tunnel forked. To the left it went on until it came to the surface. To the right it entered a darker and more roomy chamber. Understanding burrows, Makoos knew that this must be the sleeping room of her ancient foe.

Was he at home? She was not sure yet, for the place was so strong with the animal scent that she could not make out the answer. Cautiously she started into the darker tunnel, then suddenly froze as a blood-chilling snarl greeted her.

With heart pounding in excitement she began backing away slowly, fearing at any instant the danger that threatened. But by what seemed a miracle to her, disaster did not strike. In relief at last she withdrew beyond the chamber and into the tunnel which led beyond. Now if he attacked she could at least take flight.

But her old enemy kept the peace, oddly enough. Now the baying of the hounds sifted down into the tunnel more distinctly. Perhaps he, too, understood the meaning of their death chant, and was willing to strike a truce until the danger passed.

The bawling and yelping of the dogs echoed hollowly in the place and struck fresh fear in the heart of Makoos, even though she knew she was temporarily safe. She heard the dogs digging. By and by they were joined with others, as the hounds which the bounty hunters had rescued from the pit came up. At last she heard a sound which make her quake with new terror—the voices of men.

Somehow her instincts told her that these dangerous human beings had ways of getting at terrified fugitives, even though they were buried deep in the ground. Words came to her, and while they were unintelligible, they seemed to have a sinister ring.

"Get the dogs back and give me that spade," said one. "Maybe there's a she-coyote and pups down here. We can collect full bounty on every one of 'em."

"Don't act like any coyote I've ever seen," remarked the other man. "We might dig and dig, all for nothin'. Dogs can make mistakes!"

"Not *my* dogs!" was the tart reply. "Stand back and I'll show you. Old Drum never made a mistake in his life!"

Yeah?" The other man sounded unconvinced. "Looked like he made a mistake when he fell into the sand pit!"

"When I've finished here," insisted the dogs' owner stoutly, "I'll

have the answer to how *that* happened! Now stand back!"

There were strange noises that came to Makoos, the clink of metal on stones. She did not understand the meaning at once, and when nothing happened for several minutes her confidence returned. Besides, she was regaining her strength after the long run. She and the pup were safe, and presently the men and dogs would leave. The tiny silver black baby managed to secure enough nourishment so that he was quieted and fell asleep. But Makoos remained alert and watchful, listening, trying to understand what was happening.

After a time Makoos became uneasy that the men and dogs had not gone. Instead, the noise of digging became louder, and she could hear the dogs sniffing eagerly about the burrow. Several times she had the impulse to seize her pup and try escape through the back entrance to the tunnel, but always it seemed safer to stay hidden where she was.

Nevertheless her excitement grew as she became aware that the owner of the burrow, despite the truce he had struck, was getting restless. Perhaps he likewise was considering the idea of bolting through the back door. But before he could do that Makoos would have to leave, as her body blocked the tunnel. She could hear him making chirring, irritated sounds. The diggers were getting close to him.

More thudding, more clink of metal, and Makoos became tense with expectation. Something was going to happen quickly, and the thought of what it might be filled her with dread. The hounds bawled and yelped as they sought frantically to get at the prey separated from them only by a few short inches of loose sand and gravel.

"Watch out!" yelled the owner of the dogs. "I'll cut through any time now. Get ready with your club, but be careful you don't swat one of the dogs!"

Their voices stirred fresh terror in Makoos. She lay there trembling, ready to flee, the little pup, for whose precious life she was willing to give her own, gripped firmly by the back of his neck.

She heard a sudden, warning snarl from that inner chamber. Her old foe, bad-tempered at best, was becoming aroused at the violation of the peace and quiet of his home. Her muscles tautened in expectation. The dogs bellowed again, the spade rattled and clinked more rapidly.

And then it happened, abruptly and terrifyingly.

There was a startled yell from one of the men, a vicious snarling of the dogs. "Look out!" cried the man with the spade. "He's comin'. *It's a timber skunk!*"

Abruptly the tunnel became rank with a fearsome scent as the owner of the place, seized by the over-excited dogs, unloosed his terrible artillery. The pungent tang made Makoos' eyes water, and she gagged. The pup woke up whimpering. But the real drama was taking place outside the den.

There were shouts from both men as they tried to call off the dogs, but the infuriated hounds, although they would probably be ill afterward, would not be driven from their kill. Makoos heard the men shouting and screaming, then the thud of their boots as they ran. Finally even the dogs left off, and awesome silence settled over the place.

Makoos came from a hardy breed to which most odors are pleasingly tempting, but this was too much for

her. Nevertheless, she dared not leave the place because she feared th dogs might still be lurking in the vicinity.

The air cleared somewhat at last as the morning wind sifted through the half-opened tunnel. Makoos began to feel better. Even the pup was quiet now.

She heard no more of dogs or men, nor of her old foe, the inherent enemy of all foxes. Probably he was dead. If that were the case, then she need no longer fear him. Nor would he ever occupy this tunnel again.

Almost miraculously, fate had given her and her beloved pup a new home. With a little more digging it could be made comfortable. Within its cool and dark confines she could lavish her mother love on the little silver black until he grew strong and able to fend for himself, and ready to assume the heritage of royalty that was rightfully his.

The wind came cleaner and stronger and, although the tunnel could not have been endured by any creature save a fox or perhaps another skunk, it seemed almost a pleasant sanctuary to old Makoos. She would wait here until nightfall, then set out on another hunting trip.

Meanwhile she must wait. With the soft-furred pup snuggled against her weary body, she closed her eyes contentedly and slept.

THE END

BREAKING WILD CATTLE TO WORK

THE supply of work oxen was entirely too small for the demand of the Western frontier, and all sorts of schemes were tried to make up for the deficiency. Cows were yoked into the teams, and even mules were at times put in beside an ox. The resourceful freighters of the Santa Fé Trail, however, soon discovered that the Mexicans had an abundance of cattle, such as they were, and offered to buy all that were offered.

The manner of breaking these wild-eyed little bush-splitters was characteristic of the men and the times. A pair of steers of about the same weight were roped, yoked together, and then turned loose to work out their own salvation. Of course, they stampeded across the country, bucking and bawling until they were worn out. During the next few days they learned many things; that they must travel together or not at all, and that they had to both go on the same side of a tree or other obstacle.

When the rough edges had been worn off they were driven into the camp and hitched to a team long enough to pull them if they balked and strong enough to hold them from running away. In order to prevent them from "turning the yoke," their tails were tied together. The bullwhacker cracked his long whip over the backs of the leaders, and the second lesson was begun. It was crude but effectual training, and in a short time the imitative trait, possessed by all animals, caused the recruits to pull on the chain the same as they saw the rest of the team do. Many of the historic freight outfits of the Santa Fé Trail were pulled by cattle broken in this manner.

ACES COME HIGH

by JACKSON GREGORY

Part Three

Aces Come High

The Story So Far:

ROSS HAVERIL'S unexpected appearance in Black Jack Devlin's Mountain House, a famous gambling place, is a signal for trouble, as the first man he meets is Tom Storm, who once robbed him in South America. The two, to the mystification of the spectators, plunge into a fight which is ended abruptly when Devlin hits Haveril on the head with a blackjack and has him thrown out. When Bob Roberts, a friend of Haveril's, takes up the fight with Storm, Black Jack again interferes. Roberts takes Haveril to the latter's home in Secret Valley which, Ross is amazed to learn, has, during his twelve-year absence, passed into the hands of Luke Oliver, a trusted employe.

Oliver tells Haveril that his father left the valley to him in his will and that it is now mortgaged to Tom Storm, who also owns Lost Valley, which adjoins it. Ross, who has come back from his long wandering with plenty of money, which he made in South America and Mexico, makes another trip with Oliver to the Mountain House, where he plays roulette and wins fifty thousand dollars. When he and Luke leave, carrying this small fortune, they are followed by three hirelings of Devlin's who attack them in the open country. Bob Roberts, who had been present when Haveril made his killing, follows to warn his friend and is shot. Devlin's gun hands ride away, and Oliver and Haveril take the wounded man to Tom Storm's ranchhouse. There, before they can get help, Bob Roberts dies.

CHAPTER XIII

DESTROYED EVIDENCE

IT was after dark the next night when Ross Haveril, drawn-faced and heavy-browed, rode in alone to Secret Valley. Moving slowly, he unsaddled, tended to his horse and went to the ranchhouse.

Luke Oliver had already had his supper at the bunkhouse, then had come over to wait for Ross. A pair of steel-rimmed spectacles was perched on the high bridge of his nose and his brows were drawn as he concentrated on sewing a patch into the seat of a disreputable-looking pair of overalls.

"Nice little homy touch, I'll tell a man!" grinned Haveril. "It's like being married, to come back and find the busy housewife making things cozy."

"You go to hell," said Luke.

Ross sat down on a bench against the wall and rested his forearms on his knees. Head down, he seemed to be studying a thumbnail which its brother thumbnail was slowly and methodically circumnavigating.

He and Luke had left Liberty in the late afternoon, having done there all they could for Bob Roberts. They had hired a boy at the livery stable to drive Tom Storm's team and wagon back. Then the two had ridden out of Liberty on their own horses, homeward bound.

But before they came to the place where the trail split in two, one fork leading on to Secret Valley and the other to the ridge which broke down into High Flats, they had separated.

"I'm going to do a little riding on my own, Luke," young Haveril had said. "I want to look around up there where Bob was shot. "I'll join you at the ranch."

"Not dropping in on Tom Storm again, are you?" Luke had asked.

"Not tonight," Ross assured him. "We'll go together again, maybe tomorrow."

So now, after some hours apart, they sat for awhile in silence. After a few minutes Ross looked up. "I did a bit of back-tracking along the trail where Bob was shot last night," he remarked. "I found the place where the man who shot him hid. He had come up the other way from the upper end of Lost Valley on the trail that passes the place where the old Balbriggan shanty used to be. After he shot Bob the feller rode

back that same way. Bull Strake and his crowd didn't gang up with him. They rode straight on, heading toward the pass from the low side."

"Where'd he go on to, the hombre that shot Bob? Back down into Lost Valley, then which way?"

"I don't know where he went, but we'll find out," Ross said.

He related how he had found recent signs in trampled fresh grass where a hidden man had set a restive horse for some minutes. From this spot he found tracks, deeply gouged by racing hoofs, and had followed them. Before he had ridden five minutes he had noted a rusty-brown smear spattered on a bit of gray granite and had dismounted and made out that the stain was dried blood. After that there was a trail of blood.

The trail led through a scattering of timber on the upper end of High Flats, across a bit of open mountain meadow and then straight toward the cliffs which marked the rim of the benchland and dropped abruptly some two or three hundred feet. And there all sign ended.

"Sing me to sleep!" gasped Luke Oliver. "You mean to tell me he rode straight out into the air?"

"I could see from the edge, looking down," Ross went on, "where the horse had hit and rolled and then slid to the bottom. Then I saw the horse lying down there.

"So I rode along the trail until it brought me down to the base of the cliffs a couple of miles farther on, and there I doubled back until I got to the dead animal.

AND then I understod the blood trail," he said grimly. "The horse had been shot in our mix-up, not the rider. A bullet had struck him in the fore part of the shoulder and had made a long, deep gouge, then had nicked his throat. You wouldn't have thought he could run that far, but the poor devil had to run. His sides were ripped open with the spurring he'd got. By the time he got to the edge of the cliffs that horse must have been mighty tottery on his legs. Next his rider gets down, yanks off saddle and bridle, gets his horse right on the edge —and pops a bullet through his brain. One good heave sent him over, dead before he hit the rocks."

"Saddle and bridle gone, huh? Any marks on the horse, kid?"

"No marks, Luke."

"What sort of horse?"

"A dark bay. Looked like a good animal in good shape. Six years old, maybe. You're coming along with me tomorrow. The chances are that you'll know whose horse it was."

Luke nodded. "I ought to, I guess. Anyhow, we'll go have a look-see."

"I'll tell you ahead what you'll find out, old-timer," Ross said. "That it's a Lost Valley horse. It belonged to Tom Storm."

"You mean it was Storm that was hid up there? That it was Storm killed Bob?"

"I'll tell you something, Luke. It's something I didn't think anything about last night, with the other things on my mind. When I got Bob down to Lost Valley last night there wasn't anybody in the house. Lights were burning, but there wasn't a soul there. I went outside to get help. I guess I was running when I came by the barn. In the dark I bumped into someone hurrying pretty near as fast I was. He was carrying a saddle, and I got all tangled up with it. It was Tom Storm."

"Hm-m-m," said Luke. "Looks kind of bad. But just because he

was carrying a saddle don't cinch any proof on him, does it?"

"I wish you could have seen Storm's face when he came on into the house and saw Bob lying there on his sofa! Tom's a hard man to move, Luke. Just the same, he turned white for a minute and goggled like a man seeing things."

"I got you, kid," said Luke. "You mean if a feller shoots a man somewheres out in the woods and then comes home and finds him dying on his own parlor settee, he's apt to look like Storm did."

SO in the cool early morning they rode up over the ridge, down to High Flats, and on to the base of the cliffs where Ross Haveril had found the dead horse. When they got there the sun was well up, the sky filled with light. Their horses fought their bits as they got a whiff of death.

Ross and Luke sat silent in their saddles looking down for a moment, then wheeled about and rode away. They had not tarried. They had had no thought to dismount. There was no use. Here was a horse that could never be identified. During the night its rider had come back here and had laboriously removed the animal's skin.

"He's a smart cuss, kid," Luke said after they had ridden awhile, "He's using his head. He'll be hard to ketch."

"Yes, he's smart. Maybe he's outsmarted himself, though. Look, Luke: The fact that he ripped the hide off means that he's our man. And it means something else. Either he hid around all day yesterday, waiting for night to come back in, or else he lives pretty close by."

As they passed the Mountain House, smoke was rising from a chimney and a still, slight figure was standing on the porch, leaning against one of the log columns supporting the roof. It was Rose Devlin. Her face was pale, her eyes were pink-rimmed and swollen from crying. She glanced at the two horsemen, then her eyelids came slowly down and she turned away without a sign of recognition.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MEETING

ROSE DEVLIN'S eyelids, closing down so tightly, had squeezed tears out to roll down her cheeks. At the sound of her father's step behind her she brushed the tears away with the back of her hand. She did not turn toward him, but her eyes, open now and dark with hurt, followed the two horsemen until they were out of sight, down among the pines on the flank of the ridge.

"Luke Oliver and that Haveril fellow?" asked Black Jack.

Still without turning, she nodded. Her nod was a weary, lifeless gesture, and Black Jack knew that for the first time in her life the lilting, gay spirit had been crushed within her.

"See here, kid," he said, "did you love Bob, after all?"

"Yes, I loved him." She spoke quietly and steadily enough, but her voice, like herself, seemed somehow far away. "I know now that he was the finest man that ever came here, the finest man I ever knew. Yes, I loved Bob—but I wasn't in love with him."

Devlin looked relieved. "I know what you mean," he said.

"Do you?" she said wonderingly. She was wondering today about a lot of things; about herself, mostly, and for the first time.

"Why did Ross Haveril have to

come back?" she said vehemently. "Why did he have to play and win? If he hadn't, Bob would be alive now."

"Damn him," said Black Jack. "He ought to be booted out of the country. There are two kinds of Haverils. I've known them of old. He's the Haveril riffraff, bum, troublemaker. When he first came—"

"When he came," his daughter interrupted, "it was like a storm wind. Like the storm winds that go raging through the mountains, bending and breaking big pine trees. Yes, he makes trouble, but his eyes are as clear as daylight. Ross Haveril is not a bum, Jack, and you know it. If there are riffraff Haverils, he is not one of them."

Had she been looking at him, his face would have remained his habitual mask. But now an expression of perplexity, an anxious sort of perplexity, darkened it.

"I don't quite get you today, kid," he said. "You mean to tell me that you don't hate the ground he walks on?"

"Hate? I couldn't hate a storm, could I? Not even if it knocked all the trees down and carried our house away and tumbled the mountains down into the canyons. I might be afraid; I might run and try to hide. But hate it? No!"

He laughed softly and patted her shoulder. That seemed the best way to treat her, to make light of this fantastic mood.

"Look out, Miss Devlin, or you'll be making him out as fine a man as you say Bob was!"

"Maybe he is! How do we know? What do we know about him? He and Bob were friends. Theirs was a friendship that Bob died for. Maybe Ross Haveril would have died for Bob, had things been the other way."

"Well," said Black Jack.

"And I," said Rose, and at last she turned and looked into her father's eyes, "am just the little hellcat he called me. And worse than that, a nasty little coward."

"You're not! You are nothing of the kind! But I'll tell you what you are: you're upset, that's all. You've had no sleep for two nights—"

"If there had been one little thin thread of . . . of decency in me I would have been with Bob when he died. That's something for me to remember!"

"I tell you—"

"No! I tell *you!* Bob is dead. Bull Strake killed him. He is dead because he interfered when Bull Strake tried to kill and rob his friend. And you, Black Jack Devlin, sent Strake after Ross Haveril and his money. I saw Strake look at you. I saw you look back at Strake. And so Bob had to die. And when he sent for me I failed him."

DEVLIN trimmed and lighted a cigar before he said a word. There was no use telling his daughter that she did not know what she was talking about; she did know. Instead he said, "Bull Strake is a fool. I did not mean for him to kill anybody. You know that as well as I do. He just lost his head. That was a lot of money for a man like Bull Strake to think about."

She let her eyes drift away from his while he was talking. His were clear and looked frank and honest, but she knew he lied.

"You are right, Jack, saying I am upset," she said. "Maybe I will go away. You wanted me to before all this happened. Oh, I forgot, we're short of money now!"

He could laugh at that without

pretence. Hadn't he known what it was to be broke off and on all his life?

"Why shouldn't I marry Tom Storm?" the girl asked swiftly.

"Look here! Has Storm asked you to marry him?"

Now it seemed her turn to laugh. But he didn't like the sound of her laughter, it was so hard and bright and brittle.

"What's got into you, kid?" he demanded. "You know damned well that I won't have you marrying any man unless you love him. Do you love Tom Storm like that?"

"Love? What is love . . . *like that,* Jack Devlin? Do you know?"

"Maybe not," said Black Jack.

On the other hand, maybe he did know.

Jordan swung over the table and an ominous growl swept the room as Haveril knocked him down. Only then did Ross realize he had hit a one-legged man!

Looking at his daughter now he thought, as he often did, of Evelyn Dayton, the minister's daughter over at Cherokee the first time he ever saw her. Fairer than Rose Devlin she was, slighter and always with a look of girlishness about her even after she was Rose's mother and Rose was four years old.

Anyhow, whether or not he knew what love was, he had been good to his frail girl-wife. When she died, a victim of a hard winter during which pneumonia had carried off many of the weaker ones in the mountains, she had left behind her an emptiness that time had never filled. Since that first time he had seen her, Black Jack Devlin had never looked at another woman, and there had been many a girl who had smiled his way invitingly.

Black Jack moved along, taking his morning stroll on the porch that extended along three sides of the house, pausing on the west side to look down into Lost Valley, hanging briefly on his heel at the south to look down into what could be seen from here of Paradise Valley, which was all but the upper end where the old Valdez home was, moving on again until from the east he could catch through the tops of his pines intriguing glimpses of Secret Valley.

Down there, in the Haveril lands, he could see the cliffs at the northern end with their black forest growth and with the white veils of tumbling waterfalls where they flaunted bannerlike against the dark rock and lost themselves in mist behind a timber screen long before they dipped into the glassy pools five hundred feet below their beginnings.

Out of the corner of his eye he watched Rose-alba, with none of her wonted lively tread, drifting as listlessly as any light breeze-blown leaf down into the yard. She moved slowly away from the house along the ridge, and from the manner of her walk he knew that she wasn't going anywhere, that she hadn't even thought about going anywhere. It is doubtful that she saw the ground underfoot or the still, tall trees ahead of her. She just wanted to be alone, and perhaps was not even conscious of that. Well, it might do her good to be alone for a while.

ROSE'S feet followed a dim trail twisting through the pines. She passed from sunlight into shadow, a sort of greenish twilight, and soon felt herself alone as she wanted to be, with the vast stillness of the forest pressing in closer and still closer about her. She threw back her head and looked straight up through the pine branches at the occasional broken patches of deep-blue sky. In her eyes, wide open now, were both pain and sorrowful speculation. She kept thinking about Bob, and how fine he had been, and how, though he was dead now, those deep-blue patches of sky up there were just as gloriously, softly blue, just as serene as they had been before it happened.

She murmured his name, "Bob!" and said to herself, "I wish I had loved him the way he loved me. I wish we had gone away before it had to happen!" This was the first time in her life—she had no memory of her mother—that death had struck close.

The path, carpeted an inch thick with brown pine needles, kept to the spine of the ridge, and at last she knew where her feet were taking her. There was a rock which rose out of the ground like a battered and broken spire. It was called Faraway Rock and hard to scale, and danger-

ous. But at the very top there was a flat place as wide as a small room where the climber could rest and give himself up to solitude. Here she was above the pine tops; from here she had looked through many a mellow sunset and even through some infrequent dawns over what, in her young eyes, seemed like a very large section of the world.

Thinking still of Bob Roberts, she stood very still, only her loose hair faintly stirred by the merest whisper of a breeze, as she looked out across a far, blue distance to the south, across descending ridges and valley lands into an immense stretch of level lands, and beyond that into a haze wherein land and sky melted and were fused. And from thinking of Bob she began thinking of herself, as is the way with youth. She was a child now as she said aloud, so that her own words were in her ears, "O God, why do we all have to die?"

After a while, looking into the nearer distance, down in the low foothills where glimpses of the road could be caught winding gradually upward from the town of Liberty, she saw wagons coming, and her wandering thoughts were brought back to earth.

There were three four-horse teams, and the horses were straining with their loads. Where the grades steepened the drivers now and then slammed on their brakes, to keep the wagons from rolling back downhill and to breathe their horses.

Then she saw still another wagon, much nearer, far ahead of the others, when it came curving around a wooded bend and headed into Secret Valley. One could not but wonder what it meant, this unaccustomed freighting into a valley into which so few teams had come during the years she could remember.

Suddenly she understood: A Haveril had returned and meant to stay. Ross Haveril had been in Liberty yesterday. He had lost no time. No doubt these teams had started yesterday. They had camped somewhere along the road, to arrive so early.

A Haveril had come back to his valley in his mountains, and he had money in his pockets. And here came men and horses and supplies, fresh new life to drowsing old Secret Valley. Turning a little, she could even see the old Haveril house, a gray blot upon the lovely valley's verdure like a piece of lichen on a mossy-green rock. There would be lumber on those wagons. There was going to be rebuilding and then would come restocking. Ross Haveril, who would have done so much better to have died down there in South America and to have let Bob Roberts go on living, was here to stay.

And Rose-alba began wondering where and when and how she was going to meet him again. Floods of anger poured through her, and she clenched her hands at her sides and her teeth bit together hard. And yet —and this angered her, too!—she experienced a quick flick of interest. She stood there a long time looking, then slowly made her way down from her high place atop Faraway.

At the base of the rock where the dim trail ran both ways, back to the Mountain House, and on into the forest and down the slope of the ridge, she met Rita Valdez. Neighbors though they were, with but a few mountain miles between their homes, and of an age, they had never met before. Two nights ago Rita had seen Rose Devlin for the first time

Rita looked very tiny, high up on

the back of a tall black horse, and very lovely in a gay pink riding suit with her curling hair wind-blown about her face and her cheeks flushed and her big eyes bright as sunlit pools of dark water.

The girls studied each other with all the frankness of two children. Both were young enough to permit the expressions upon their lips and in their eyes to be only thinly veiled, but both Rose-alba and Rita Valdez showed their pretty white teeth in a smile!

"Oh!" said the little Rita, and her hand flew to her breast. "You . . . you are Rosy Devlin!"

"I am Rose-alba Devlin. Some of my best friends call me Rosalie," said Rose. She struck her own pose, tossing back her glorious mane of hair. She knew that she was at a disadvantage in having to look up, purely in the physical sense, to the girl on horseback. She sweetened her smile. "And you," she said graciously. "I know! You are Chita Valdez!"

Chita! Oh! There was a Chita in the Valdez kitchen!

"I am Miss Valdez of the Hacienda Paraiso," Rita said, "and my name is Rita Valdez."

And so she was "Miss" Valdez! And Rose Devlin, all too late, wished she had availed herself likewise of that ice-clad title. Too late now, but not too late, however, to overlay her smile with an extra coat of ice.

"It is so nice that at last you have found time to come to see us—if you are really calling at the Mountain House," she said. "Only, I am sorry that—"

She was going to say how regretful it was that Rita had chosen the wrong day, that there would be no one at home, that she herself, as Miss Valdez could see, was on her way somewhere else. But Rita cut right across her words. "Oh, no! I was just passing by."

Now Rita Valdez had never ridden this way before, and unless she turned back there were only two places the trail could lead her. One was the Mountain House, the other was Secret Valley. Rose Devlin was given fresh fuel for the fires of her curiosity. What in the world, she wondered, did the Valdez girl want in Secret Valley?

Ross Haveril? Of course. Who else? She took fresh stock of the girl's chic loveliness. "Maybe she saw him when he went through Paradise Valley on his way to Liberty," she thought. "She isn't wasting much time!" She put a good deal of all that into her smile as she said softly:

"Ross Haveril rode by here a little while ago. If you hurry, you might even overtake him before he gets back to Secret Valley."

Instead of answering her, Rita glanced over her shoudler. "Romero! *Venga!*" she called sharply. "Come here, Romero!"

Old Romero, on a fat and lazy pony, came into sight. When he saw his little mistress conversing with Black Jack Devlin's daughter he was scandalized. Also, he was frightened. He'd get the skin taken off his back if Don Rodriguez found out!

"Ride ahead, Romero," Rita commanded. "Show me the way and I will follow you." She said a stiff "Good-by" to Rose Devlin and trotted off in Romero's wake.

And Rose, having frowned after the departing riders, who soon vanished among the pines, again climbed to the top of Faraway Rock. "She is pretty," she thought. "They never told me she was as

pretty as she is. She is as pretty as I am—maybe prettier." And then she remembered a look she had first of all surprised in Rita's big, expressive eyes. "She isn't just taking a ride," she mused. "She is going somewhere and in a hurry. Her horse was wet with sweat. And until she began showing off before me, she was worried—or excited. Scared! That's what she was! And going to see Ross Haveril! Now that's funny—"

She saw the freight wagons move on slowly, but she no longer watched them. Her steady gaze held now to the upper end of the valley, with the open acres about the old gray house and straggling outbuildings and corrals, and with the far edge of the wood, where presently Rita Valdez should reappear if she really was going to a meeting with Ross Haveril.

Rose knew she would have to wait a long while, an hour at least, maybe two hours, but she had no thought of quitting her post until her curiosity was satisfied. But before many minutes had dragged by she realized that "satisfied" was the wrong word. If she came to assure herself that Rita Valdez had made this long ride on unaccustomed trails to a rendezvous with Ross Haveril she would but be faced by another question: "Why?"

Then, after a while, far down in the valley, she saw in the bright sunlight the tall black horse carrying the slim figure in the gay pink riding suit. Rita, riding out of the pines, stopped, and presently her escort, old Romero, whom evidently she had commanded to ride behind her as soon as she was again sure of the trail, came to her side. While Romero rode on at a gallop toward the ranchhouse, Rita withdrew until again she was hidden by the wall of the forest.

At his door, Ross Haveril sang out, "Come ahead." Old Romero, his hat twirling in his hands, his face screwed up unhappily, opened the door and stood on the threshold.

"Señor," he said, "there is someone who has come to talk to you."

"Well?" exclaimed Ross Haveril. "Bring him alone. What's he hanging back for? Who is it, anyhow?"

"It's someone," muttered Romero, "who waits back yonder under the trees. You are to go there with me. It—the matter is important."

"Who the devil are you?" Haveril demanded.

"Me, I am Romero, señor. From the Hacienda Paraiso."

Ross Haveril thought that he understood. It would be that little conniving rooster, Valdez, who would come sneaking up this way.

"Tell him to come here if he wants to talk with me," he said sharply.

"But, señor—"

"Dammit, man, can't you see I'm busy?"

He was busy. His stubble of beard had begun to irk him. With one side of his face still lathered and the other scraped clean, he turned back to his cracked mirror.

Romero got through a second, "But, señor—" when Haveril blasted him with curses.

"Señor," Romero whispered hurriedly, "it is . . . it is the Señorita Valdez. She must not be seen here. And there is something—I don't know what, but something that she swears is like life and death itself! For the love of God, señor!"

So Ross Haveril finished shaving and went out to the barn for a horse and galloped in Romero's wake across the fields to the edge of the forest. He whistled softly when he saw the picture the girl made in her

Continued on page 120

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

Any other readers, who are interested in the possibilities of life in Mississippi, are invited to write to John North, who will tell them where to get detailed, illustrated information about this garden State.

HERE'S a reader with refreshing frankness. And after reading his letter I think there's a lot to be said for his point of view. Anyway, here's part of what he has to say:

"I'm one of the laziest men that ever lived. I'm not much of a farmer, but I like the idea of raising the things I have to have, fishing a lot, hunting a lot, and having plenty of time to roam the woods and the fields and the streams. I've managed to save a few dollars, and that's where you come in. I'd like to know about a place—if there is such a place—where a fellow can buy a little patch of ground very cheaply, where there's a long growing season so I can raise most of my food, and where there's plenty of fishing and hunting. In other words, I'd like to put nature to work supporting me and supplying me with amusement. I imagine the Gulf Coast would be pretty close to my ideas because the more widely known win-

ter-resort States would be too expensive. Can you make any suggestions?"

I can make such a suggestion, and at the same time I might make the comment that maybe you haven't such a bad idea, after all. I'd recommend that you look into the possibilities of Mississippi, one of the Gulf States which has a temperature about like that of northern Florida or southern California.

It never gets too cold down in Mississippi in the two winter months of December and January, the temperature rarely going below fifty, and in the hottest months rarely above seventy-five degrees.

And now see how that fits in your lazy man's program. Suppose you raise cotton for your cash crop. Most farmers do, since cotton is the mainstay of agriculture down there. You plant it in March, lay it by in July, and pick and sell it in August.

For the average Mississippi farmer, that six months of growing cotton is about all the work he does. When he gets his crop sold in August he knocks off work until next March.

If you're a hunter, you won't be disappointed in Mississippi, because, of the State's entire area of more than fifteen million acres, over half of the total area is in forest.

At the present time there is a branch of industry combining chemistry and agriculture, referred to usually as "chemurgy," which is finding new uses for agricultural products. The wood of the trees is treated chemically and made into plastics, materials similar to bakelite, which are used for thousands of different commercial articles, such as radio cabinets, building material, auto parts, electrical fixtures, et cetera. Wood from Mississippi forests also is made into white paper, newsprint paper, and rayon. If you owned a few acres of this land, which you can buy for five dollars an acre, you would be able in a few years to live off the proceeds of the timber alone.

If you like trees—and what outdoorsman doesn't?—there are two orchard crops that don't take much work and are widely grown in Mississippi. They are tung nuts and pecans.

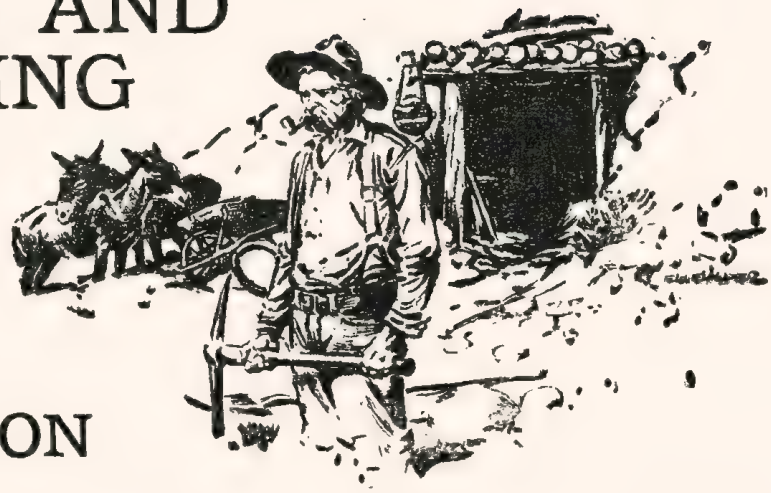
Pecans represent another great cash crop for the man who is interested in tree cultivation. Mississippi is the home of the paper-shell pecan industry. It is a recorded fact that in no other State has nature produced as many varieties of paper-shell pecans as in Mississippi. The soil there is ideal for them, and pecans grow wild all over the State.

If I were a man who liked easy living in an ideal climate with a chance to do plenty of hunting and fishing, and if I could settle in one place for life, I would seriously consider locating in Mississippi. And I'd seriously investigate the pecan business there.

We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

MINES AND MINING



By

J. A. THOMPSON

NATIVES of Los Angeles need not go farther than their own county to find both lode and placer gold mining in active progress, and a mineralized field in which to prospect. In fact, gold digging is an old game in Los Angeles, California, one that antedates the great trek of '49 to the bonanza goldfields farther north.

"Is there any gold mining, or a chance to prospect for gold right in the vicinity of Los Angeles?" queries B. T. Y., of that city.

Our answer: There certainly is—and has been for a hundred years. But the tremendous wealth of oil in the county (between sixty and seventy million gallons a year are produced) and the glamour of Hollywood's movie industry have more or less taken the play away from Los Angeles as a gold-mining center.

Nevertheless, as far back as 1834 placer gold was discovered in the gravels of San Francisquito, Placerita, Castoca and San Feliciana Canyons. It was worked by the priests of San Fernando and Santa Buena Ventura missions.

A few years later the intermittent placers of San Gabriel Canyon were worked by the priests of the San Gabriel mission. This was before the discovery of gold by Marshall at Sutter's Mill. Yet even today individuals and small-scale operators regularly work San Gabriel Canyon for colors and an occasional small nugget. The present-day pickings, however, are fairly slim. But the practice is excellent, and it is a good place to gain a little practical experience in gold washing for the beginner who lives in or around Los Angeles.

The canyon can be reached easily from the city by taking the San Bernardino road out past Pasadena to Azusa, then cutting off up into San Gabriel Canyon itself.

Another Los Angeles placer center can be reached by going out San Fernando Boulevard, then turning off to Saugus and Newhall. From Saugus roads lead up to and wind through Mint, Bouquet and San Francisquito Canyons. Here again the ground is not bonanza stuff, but colors can be won by washing.

As for lode gold, the districts in which mines have already been discovered in Los Angeles County are widely scattered. A few seasons ago W. J. Rogers, while attempting

to develop water (gold wasn't even on his mind) discovered a fine gold-bearing vein on the north slope of Sawmill Mountain, on the south side of Antelope Valley some sixteen miles east of Gorman. The discovery caused a flurry of excitement. Rogers and Gentry developed the mine, shipping their ore, which ran about forty dollars in gold to the ton, to the Tropico mill near Rosamond. More than one hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold was produced from the mine within little more than a year after its discovery.

Then there is the Governor Mine, twenty miles east of Saugus in the Mint Canyon area. This is an old property, worked in 1889 by Governor Gage. Lately it has been put in shape again, developed and reopened by the governor's son, Francis Gage. And the operation has been a decided success. So much so that it has stimulated, as a good mine always does, further prospecting in the vicinity.

East of Acton eighteen miles, the Monte Cristo Mine has turned in a reported production of better than seventy thousand dollars from four stubby ore shoots only about thirty-five feet long but from two and one half to three feet wide.

These are just a few of the more successful properties. There are plenty of other mines with good possibilities in Los Angeles County, and as time goes on, increased interest in gold mining and local prospecting may bring to light yet more paying propositions within a short drive of the heart of Los Angeles itself.

Meantime, both prospecting and gold production are going right along. For instance, one man worked a lease on the Don Mine, which lies on the south side of Mint Canyon, about eighteen miles from Saugus, made a shipment of nine tons of ore from the eighty-foot level which was reported to run forty dollars in gold per ton. Twenty dollars to thirty-dollars-a-ton ore has been reported in the Dawn Mine right behind Pasadena, in Millard Canyon, on the southwest slope of Mt. Lowe. And so it goes.

Aside from gold, ores containing antimony have been reported near Lancaster and in Pacoima Canyon. Chrome iron ore occurs in the neighborhood of Acton and Bouquet Canyon as float, but ore in place has apparently not yet been found. Copper occurs at Black Mountain, near Acton, and east of Palmdale; Molybdenum in Lang Canyon, six miles north of Altadena; and manganese five miles west of Palmdale. These known deposits have not as yet been brought into active production. But others may still be found in the county, and they constitute metals that will become increasingly important in our country's internal metallic mineral economy as time goes on. It behooves prospectors to be on the watch for commercially workable deposits of them wherever they may be working, even though gold or silver may be their main quest.

We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by HELEN RIVERS

THE Boss of the Roundup turned the following letter from Mr. Kennedy over to your keeper of the Tree to publish and we're mighty glad to do it. Mr. Kennedy wants a little different kind of Pen Pal than most of you ask for. In fact, it sure 'nough sounds as though he wants to hear from some of the true-to-life characters right out of our own Western stories. All you old-time sheriffs and "lightning draw" outlaws who feel like hunkering down and spilling a tale or two of the olden days, just drop him a line. He's sure interested in hearing about your experiences.

Howdy Boss:

Tonight I come to you with an unusual request. I'm interested in learning whether or not there are any real old-time sheriffs and ex-outlaws of the West who haven't been bedded down in the Happy Hunting grounds? I mean men who really went to town, who really did make six-gun history. I'd like to have some first-hand accounts of the exciting scrapes in which they had a part. I'd like to hear from old-time sheriffs who have tangled with big-time outlaws and I'd like to hear personally from any one-time outlaw who tangled with famous sheriffs and lived to see the error of his ways. I have something in mind which might be mutually beneficial to any old-timer who cares to relate some of his Western experiences, so come on, you old-time peace makers and old-time "lightning draw" train robbers and rustlers. There may be "gold in them thar stories."—C. J. Kennedy, 1437 Addison Street, Chicago, Illinois

Betty Ruth can tell you all about life in the Army—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I've been reading letters in the Hollow Tree for some time now, but I've never written before. I would like very much to hear from some Pen Pals. I live in an army post and would especially like to hear from folks living in foreign countries. I'd love to exchange snapshots and gifts.—Betty Ruth Rarey, Holabird Quartermaster Depot, Baltimore, Maryland

This sailor likes swing music—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I've been reading this magazine for some time and decided I'd like lots of Pen Pals from all over. I'm twenty-two years old and am a sailor serving aboard the U. S. S. *Maryland*. I have traveled a great deal, so you can rest assured my letters will be interesting. I like to dance and enjoy swing music. I will gladly exchange snapshots with everyone, so hurry, Pen Pals, and let's get acquainted.—Harvey C. Whiteman, U. S. S. *Maryland*, San Pedro, California

"Jackie's" mailman goes right by her door—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I'm so tired of seeing the mailman go right by my house that I'm writing to you to see if you can get me some Pen Pals so he'll have to stop here often. I live in the capitol of a breathtakingly beautiful State, Vermont. In the fall it is beautifully brilliant, in the summer refreshingly green, in the winter so white and gleaming, and in the spring so fragrant with all the spring odors. As for myself, I'm sixteen years old, attend school and am keen about all sports, especially basketball, and I collect stamps as a hobby. My nickname is "Jackie."—Jacquelyn Recor, 3 Toplin Street, Montpelier, Vermont

All CCC's write to Frederick—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am twenty years old and want some Pen Pals in other CCC camps or who at one time have been with the CCC. Last month I completed three years in the CCC, and I would like some information about different camps, their work projects, army and technical personnel, education and recreation, so come on, boys, drop me a line.—Frederick L. Dobek, Company 2125, CCC Burnt Mill Camp, Beulah, Colorado

Calling all cowboys and cowgirls—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Here are a few lines from Hawaii, far away across the Pacific Ocean. I am a lonely girl in my early teens and I'd like to have some

Pen Pals from foreign countries as well as from the good old United States. I would particularly favor letters, however, from cowboys and cowgirls from the Western States. They will receive immediate answers and I will also exchange snapshots and souvenirs.—Mildred Nouchi, 800—15th Avenue, Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii

Everett is a Western Story fan—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Have you room in your circle for a lonely farm boy? I am free, white and twenty-five and have been a faithful reader of Western Story Magazine for over five years. My favorite pastime is reading and writing letters and my hobbies are collecting songs and photos. So come on, boys and girls, from anywhere and everywhere and fill up my mailbox.—Everett Williams, Hardburly, Kentucky

Margaret is lonesome way out in New Zealand—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a lonely girl eighteen years old living way out here in New Zealand and I would like some Pen Pals from your part of the world. I love cowboy music. Come on, all you males and females, and write to me.—Margaret Waiariki, Waihau Bay, Ornaiti Beach, Via Opotiki, New Zealand

Here's a true Pen Pal who needs cheering up—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am very lonesome and unhappy and I would like to hear from Pen Pals, boys and girl, eighteen years old or older from anywhere in the United States or Canada. I have lots to tell them and I sure enjoy writing letters. I love all sports but my favorites are ice skating and hunting. Write me, boys and girls, cheer me up and make my life worth living and I promise that you will have a true Pen Pal for ever and ever.—Lawrence Blessing, Box 576, Genoa, Nebraska

A Canadian Pal wanted here—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I wonder if you would find me a Pen Pal? I am seventeen years old and my favorite sports are swimming and hiking. If possible, I would like my Pen Pal to be Canadian, so please help me find one.—Margaret Craig, 15 Hyndland Street, Glasgow, W. 1, Scotland

Write to these two lonely soldiers—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Two soldiers in far off Hawaii are longing for news from home and would like to exchange snapshots and letters with young men and women everywhere. Lacy is six feet tall and is an all 'round sportsman and outdoor man. Joe is six feet, four inches tall, and also likes all sports, especially swimming and tennis. We will answer all letters promptly and promise to make ours interesting.—Lacy W. Gray and Joe P. Campbell, Co. A, 27th Inf., Schofield Barracks, Territory of Hawaii.

Eric will send you some views of London—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have been reading Western Story Magazine for some time and have always wanted some steady Pen Pals abroad, so here I am hoping to get letters from boys and girls everywhere. I am seventeen years old and can write some interesting letters about London. I will send postcards and views of London's sights and will answer all letters I receive.—Eric Hawkes, 26 Eddystone Road, Brockley, London, S. E. 4, England

GET THIS FREE

PICTURE OF THE MONTH

Here's your opportunity to obtain FREE a series of colorful framing reproductions of striking *Western Story* covers. Simply fill out and send in together FOUR coupons, each clipped from consecutive issues of *Western Story Magazine*. The Picture of the Month for your latest coupon will be sent. Start now! Clip this coupon and save for your handsome **Picture of the Month** collection.

EDITOR, WESTERN STORY
79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Name..... Age.....

Address..... ..... Feb. 18th issue

Here are the names of the stories I liked best in this issue:

First..... Third.....

Second..... Fourth.....

BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO VIENNA VANISHES IN PLAIN SIGHT
Nov. 25, 1809

COLORED LIGHTS SEEN OVER ISLE OF MAN
Feb., 1938

MYSTERIOUS COLLIERY EXPLOSION CAUSED BY STRANGE LIGHT
July 14, 1938

ZEPPELIN HINDENBURG WRECKED BY WEIRD COLORED LIGHTS
July, 1937

KING GEORGE V REPORTS SEEING STRANGE COLORED LIGHTS
June 11, 1881

5,436-TON VESSEL, WITH CREW OF 38, VANISHES IN CALM SEA
May 16, 1938

CAN NEGRO EYE SEE BEYOND VISION OF WHITE?
Herald-Tribune

HERD OF CATTLE MADDENED BY MYSTERIOUS FEAR
Herald-Tribune

DOGS FRIGHTENED BY MYSTERIOUS NOTHING
Herald-Tribune

Newspapers, today and yesterday, report the disappearance or wrecking of trains, boats, airplanes and the vanishing of people, all associated with the phenomena of strangely colored lights—seen by some but not by all!

Are these facts associated with the action of people who at the last moment decide, through some strange intuition, not to board a train or ship that is later wrecked?

Founded on facts, Eric Frank Russell has written "Sinister Barrier" the most astonishing story since H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds"!

Start this story today. It will fire your imagination. You will live with the characters through the most unusual experience of your life. It is destined to take its place with "War of the Worlds" by H. G. Wells, "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" by Jules Verne, "The Lost World" by Conan Doyle and "Outward Bound" by Sutton Vane.

SINISTER BARRIER

By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

a complete novel in

The Big 160-page March Issue Of

UNKNOWN

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

NOW ON SALE 20 CENTS PER COPY

MISSING DEPARTMENT

FOLEY, DELOSS CLYDE—He is my brother and we have not seen or heard from him for thirty years. Our brother, Owen, is dead, and mother and I are living together now. He was last seen in Portland, Oregon. If he sees this, or if anyone who knows him sees it, please write to his aunt, Mrs. Van Niles, 811 South Hadden Avenue, Elkeno, Canadian County, Oklahoma.

FOSTER, JAMES—He is my brother and might be using the name Clarence Moore. He is fifty-four years old and was last heard from in 1932, at which time he was in Washington, D. C. He is five feet, eleven inches tall and has brown eyes. "Jim, please get in touch with us. I want you so much. Sue is alone and so lonely."—Minnie E. Healey, 9 Gleason Road, Shrewsbury, Massachusetts

ROWLEY, EVERETT—When he was young, he was a bareback rider in a circus. He married Mettawee Blanton of Florresville, Texas, and had two children, a girl named Frances, and a boy named Rex. His wife left him in Larned, Kansas, when Rex was two weeks old. The little girl died at the age of three and Rex died when he was thirty-five. I was told that he married again in Mexico. He had an uncle named John Rowley in Dakota, a cousin Stella in Kansas and a sister in Galveston, Texas. We haven't heard from him for some years and his grandchildren would like to hear from him or his relatives or his children. We are anxious to know what has become of him. Anyone having any information, please write to Mrs. Rex Rowley, R. F. D. No. 1, Box 295B, Port Arthur, Texas.

NOTICE—Will Edward Leonard, whose mother's name was Mary and whose father's name was Charles, please write to me, Minnie E. Healey, 9 Gleason Road, Shrewsbury, Massachusetts.

STILES, GLENN E.—He is twenty-six years old, has dark hair, gray-blue eyes, is six feet, two inches tall and weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. I haven't heard from him directly for about three years, but I did hear that he was living in Racine, Wisconsin, last summer. If anyone has any information, please write to "Millie," in care of the Missing Department, Western Story Magazine.

ATTENTION—I am trying to locate the heirs of Wiley and Elizabeth Barber Sweetin. Their oldest daughter's name was Ellen. Wiley Sweetin was marshal in Oelrichs, South Dakota, in 1890. On July 5, 1890, he tried to arrest three cowboys and had a shooting fray with one. If anyone has any information about their children please communicate with me, Sam Anderson, Edgemont, South Dakota.

HENRY, V. H.—He was last seen in Omaha, Nebraska, on November 25, 1936. He is forty-two years old, has iron-gray hair, blue-gray eyes, weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds and is about five feet, six inches tall. He was last employed with the Nebraska Hardware Mutual Insurance Company, of Lincoln, Nebraska, and the State Farm Insurance Company, of Omaha, Nebraska. Both his employers have offered to give him back his job if we can reach him. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please communicate with his wife, Mrs. V. H. Henry, 2220 Jones Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

BREEDLOVE, GARLAND—He was last heard of in Tuscon, Arizona, on September 15, 1938. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please communicate with me, Evalena Younglove, Rt. No. 2, Abilene, Texas.

LOGAN, RAY—He was last heard of four or five years ago when he was in Port Isabel, Texas. He is five feet, five inches tall, has light hair and eyes and a fair complexion. When last heard from he was working for the Bunnell Fish Company. If anyone has any information concerning his whereabouts, please communicate with us, Mr. and Mrs. Barney Logan, Box 291, Denbo, Pennsylvania.

WOODFIN, GUY—He is my father's brother and was last heard from in 1920. He used to live in Leesburg, Texas. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please communicate with me, Merle Woodfin, Rt. No. 3, Ennis, Texas.

FIKE, EDWARD A.—He is my father, and my brother and I have not heard from him since 1932. He said he was going to California, and we had one letter from him from there and have not heard from him since. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please communicate with me, Edward Fike, Woromyk, Q. M. Det., San Antonio, Texas.

There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notices, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to anyone who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

PRESTO! ANYONE CAN MASTER GLAZE

LEAVES HARD GLASS-LIKE FINISH

SEALS THE PORES OF THE SURFACE

EASY TO APPLY

PROTECTS THE SURFACE

WILL NOT FINGER-MARK

NO OILY FILM AS WITH POLISH

EASY TO KEEP CLEAN

NO SMEAR OR STREAKS AS WITH WAX

LASTS SIX MONTHS TO A YEAR

SAVES YOU MONEY

It's Different! AMAZING NEW GLAZE BEAUTIFIES and PROTECTS

CAR Owners! Meet MASTER GLAZE—the sensationally different luster for new and used cars!

Not a wax—not an oil polish—not a paint—nothing that "smears" over the surface. It's a creamy liquid—quick and easy to apply. A matchbox full is enough to glaze an entire car! Enables every motorist to keep his car finish sparkling—beautiful as a showroom car. Also amazingly restores gleaming luster to dull weather-beaten cars. Gives a hard glass-life surface without smear or streaks! Nothing like it!

Millions of motorists have the problem of keeping their cars looking new. They all want gleaming, shiny, streak free appearance without hard work and rubbing. Now with this new and different Master Glaze method, anyone can quickly and easily Master Glaze his car, obtaining sparkling brilliance, with a beautiful, smooth, mirror-like surface.

Master Glaze is so durable—so protective to the surface—that even washing with gasoline does not affect its brilliant luster. Lasts six months to a year!

Car Owners Praise MASTER GLAZE

I have used a great many polishes, and waxes, but will say Master Glaze is the winner. Clarence Gray, Calif.

IT LOOKS SWELL

Master Glaze is the best I have ever used and is put on the easiest. I glazed my car last Sunday, and boy!—does it look swell. Lewis Thompson, Ill.

STANDS THE TEST

Master Glaze has been put to the test here directly in front of the Atlantic, where the salt spray with the fine beach sand, including road dirt, form a heavy film on paint Your Cleaner lifted the film and brought back the original shine. H. M Chambers, N. J.

LONG LASTING

Used Master Glaze on my car last summer. It stood up all winter in good shape. Now my friends are asking about it. so will sell. A. Stonis, Ill.

SELLS 8 IN HOUR

Master Glazed a car on a demonstration in the parking lot and sold eight sets within one hour. I am delighted with it as a fine product and as a good seller. Edmund M. Blanken, Pa.

VERY MUCH PLEASED

Received shipment of 96 sets and have been very much pleased with the way it sells. It out-demonstrates any and every type of cleaner and polish I have seen. Dave Jones, Mont.

It's Fun To MASTER GLAZE

It's really a pleasure to Master Glaze. You almost feel like a magician when you see the quickness and ease with which you can transform your car into a thing of gleaming beauty. New cars and good paint jobs are entitled to this protection—old cars with dull paint almost instantly look like different cars. No experience is required. Even a child can Master Glaze.

New Car Beauty SAVES YOU MONEY

Master Glaze glorifies the beauty of your car, protects the finish, and saves you money. Less washing, less polishing, less work. You will have a more beautiful car to drive, and a car whose resale value will always be more. You owe it to yourself and to your car to find out about Master Glaze. Send your name for free booklet and free trial offer.

FREE OFFER COUPON

MASTER GLAZE COMPANY,
7720-40 W. Harwood Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: Please send your FREE illustrated booklet and tell me how I can get Master Glaze for my own car FREE. This does not obligate me in any way.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE.....

AGENTS - **Write for Big Profit and Free Offer Plan**

Choice territories open. You can make big money taking care of local business and get Master Glaze for your own car free by helping introduce it. Don't delay. Send the free offer coupon today!

MASTER GLAZE COMPANY,
7720-40 W. Harwood Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.

The Making Of A Buckaroo

Continued from page 75

right-hand swing at Potluck's jaw. Potluck tucked in his chin and knocked him down. It was a good solid punch and it put young Havewell quietly to sleep.

"Now," said Potluck, eying the cook and the two riders, "I'm givin' you gents just time enough to saddle broncs and drift. If yo're spotted in North Park come daylight, yo're game for any man's gun, and there'll be some lookin' for yuh. It's open season on you boys. Now, scatter!"

Tommy waggled a gun at Harry Clute, who started to follow. "You sit where yo're at, tinhorn. I just thought o' a use for you. Hold him, amigo!" Tommy grinned, then marched the Winged V cook and riders from the house and to the barn. Whether or not they would quit the country was very uncertain. At any rate, a few minutes later the drumming of their mounts faded down the trail toward Three Forks.

Potluck smiled thinly at Harry Clute. "What hardware you packin', feller?" he questioned.

The tinhorn swallowed hard. "I . . . I only got a . . . a derringer," he said reluctantly, slowly lowering his hands.

"Keep 'em up there," cautioned Potluck. "I'll find it!" He uncovered one derringer in a pocket of Clute's checkered vest, and another in the gambler's boot leg. "You wouldn't lie to a man, would you?" he grinned. "I reckon Too-bad reckons to take you for a ride. Gather up yore winnin's. You'll need 'em, hombre!"

Clute swallowed again. "Where we going?" he asked chokingly.

"We aim to teach young Havewell the ways o' the range," replied Potluck dryly. "And I reckon you got something to learn, too, jazz-bones."

BY the time Tommy returned, Leland Havewell was beginning to stir. Painfully he sat up, rubbing his chin. He was in a semiliquid condition and, without delay, was taken outside and poured into a saddle. The night ride began.

There was little talk. Harry Clute didn't ask any questions. There wasn't much backbone in him. He seemed to think himself lucky to be alive and obeyed promptly, if not willingly. The crisp night air cleared Leland's head somewhat, and he jelled in his saddle and went to sleep. So far, so good, Potluck mused, riding steadily in the lead, with Tommy bringing up the rear.

Potluck was headed north, following Middle Fork, climbing to higher elevations, and entering rugged, partly timbered country perched on the east shoulder of the Continental Divide. From time to time, he looked back, viewing his shadowy cavalcade. It was, most certainly, a well-scrambled posse with which to trail stolen cattle and fight a rustling gang. He wondered when Speed Sorrels would show up, and if from in front or behind. The Winged V boss was not the caliber to cut and run. He was a grim, deadly killer, a two-gun desperado who would hang tough until he died with his boots on, a shooting iron in hand. Better if Sorrels had been in the poker game. Now he was a menace to be watched for constantly.

The sun was up before Potluck drew rein, choosing a secluded

mountain meadow for their stop. He looked at Tommy and grinned. Tommy eyed Harry Clute.

"Waal, cookie, set down yore packs and rustle some chuck for breakfast," Tommy said.

"Who, me?" said the tinhorn, bewildered. "I can't cook!"

"You won't l'arn any younger," said Tommy, "and you better l'arn danged quick." He motioned to the two pack animals in the string. "Git a wiggle on, shuck them packs!" he commanded. "You, Lee, pile out o' that hull an' rustle wood. Dry wood, savvy? We don't aim to raise a smudge. Snap out o' it, pretty boy. Come alive!"

Leland Havewell was in the throes of a hangover. He was stiff with the cold and long hours a-saddle, and he felt angry and mean. "I'll be damned if I will," he muttered. "You can't get away with this! You don't know who I am!"

"Yo're the cook's flunky," Potluck informed him. "Shake a leg!"

Havewell commenced to cuss, using stronger language than the night before. Potluck dismounted, strode over and pulled him from the saddle. Leland began at once to swing his fists. Potluck belted him on the butt of the left ear and put him down. Leland came up groggy.

"Dry wood!" said Potluck. "An' don't let the grass grow under yore feet, Lee."

"I'll kill you for this," Leland Havewell grated through set teeth. "I'll kill you, damn you!"

"Maybe," grinned Potluck. "But not until you've worked off a heap o' whiskey bloat. I aim to see you do that, Lee."

The gambler's slender hands were plucking at the intricacies of a double diamond hitch, tightly and securely holding a pack in place. "Don't start talking back to these hellions," Clute cautioned. "They'd just as soon blow your head off as spit in your eye. Didn't I tell—"

"Stop yore gab," warned Tommy. "You better be takin' notice how that tie comes off. It'll be yore job to rope that pack again. An' I'm tellin' you, you better not be lettin' it slip. We don't want no sore-back hosses."

Harry Clute groaned, beginning to understand he was to suffer hardships. His first thought had been that these two pilgrims were Cattle Association men. Now he believed Potluck and Tommy to be outlaws of the wildest order, who were kidnaping Leland Havewell for a heavy ransom which his millionaire father would be only too glad to pay. Writhing inwardly, the tinhorn was sure he would die miserably, a bullet in his head, just as soon as his usefulness was past. Making himself helpful was the only way to prolong life. His tender fingers tore frantically at the pack rope. Love of life was strong in him.

Sulkily, Leland Havewell set about gathering wood and kindling a fire, feeling himself upon the sharp horns of a dilemma. On one horn, he wanted to kill Potluck Jones; but on the other, he didn't know just how to go about it. Hate began to stiffen his backbone. It was a deadly, insistent emotion. He had never really hated anyone before.

"Yore breakfast wasn't a howlin' success," stated Tommy, eying Harry Clute after the meal was eaten.

"I'll do better next time," promised the tinhorn hastily, his pasty face reddened from the cooking fire.

"If you don't, there may be no next time," grinned Tommy. "It'll be just too bad!"

LELAND HAVEWELL finished scrubbing out the dishes, then sat down to smoke a ready-made cigarette. Potluck watched him, a half smile on his face, wondering if his medicine was beginning to take. Havewell's mouth was beginning to tighten up, and it gave him an older, more solid look.

"Lee," said Potluck evenly, "a drink o' liquor might help that hangover. Want one?"

"Not if I've got to beg for it!" Havewell retorted.

"Fine!" grinned Potluck. "I'll let you earn it."

"To hell with you!" Leland Havewell snapped.

"Lee, when you say that—smile!" There was an edge to Potluck's firm voice.

"To hell with you!" Leland snarled again.

"I'll teach you something," said Potluck, tossing his Colt to Tommy.

Leland sprang up. For a moment it was rough and tumble. But Leland, though forty pounds heavier, found his whiskey-bloated muscles no match for this trail-hardened rider's supple strength. He was picked up bodily, thrown over a pack, pinned there face downward, helpless to do anything save kick.

"Git over there and hold his boots, jazz-bones," Potluck instructed Harry Clute.

The tinhorn flung himself upon Leland's thrashing legs. Tommy, at a look from Potluck, began to grin, kicking out of his silver-ornamented chaps.

"Son," said Potluck, "we got you over a barrel. We aim to make a man o' you. Holler when you've had enough. Lay it on, Too-bad!"

With a cowboy's zest, Tommy began to flail the snug-fitting seat of Leland's tailored breeches. The chaps were heavy with silver. The conchas painfully sharp. The chapping ran up to over thirty licks before Leland said a word. Then, "Damn you! I got enough!" he declared stridently.

"Give him some more, Too-bad," instructed Potluck. "He didn't say it right."

Tommy swung his chaps down seven more times, taking his job more seriously now.

"I got enough!" repeated young Havewell.

They let him up. His face was white, twisted, his eyes wild with hate. "Sometime I'll kill all three of you!" he declared in a cold flat voice. "All of you!"

"That's fine," said Potluck, going to his saddle. He returned with Leland's pearl-handled six-shooter. "Here's yore iron, Lee. Start learnin' how to use it. When you get quick enough on the draw, I'll give you some shells to practice with. When you get tired o' livin', I'll let you draw on me."

Potluck watched young Havewell examine his empty gun, then run his fingers around the empty loops of his cartridge belt. There was wildness in the boy, a temper, heretofore uncurbed, that rode him hard. It was a temper that could well be the making of him or determine his ultimate defeat. Havewell opened his lips as if to curse, then checked himself. Slowly he thrust the empty Colt in its holster.

"I don't know what your game is," he said, his voice brittle. "But whatever it is, you can't get away with it for long."

"Maybe," smiled Potluck. "At any rate, let's saddle fresh hosses and get along. Lee, you throw yore hull on that pinto with the mismated eyes. Jazz-bones, start ropin' yore packs."

Veils of mist hung about the upper peaks. The sky was beginning to look overcast, and the morning sun brought little warmth. The pinto they had brought along for Havewell was tractable enough when saddled. But when Leland mounted, the animal suddenly dogged its head, broke in the middle and piled him the second jump. Then it paused, motionless, viewing with watery, angry eyes the rider it had thrown.

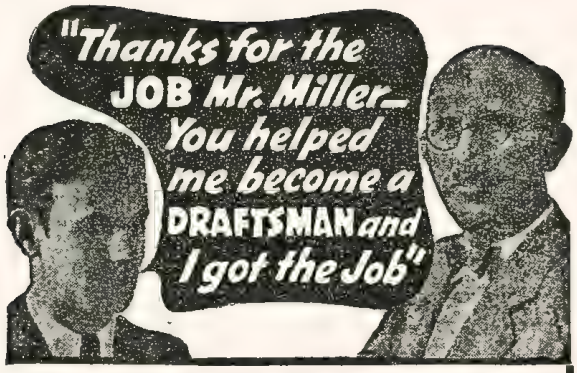
"Try him again," said Potluck, when young Havewell climbed unsteadily to his feet. "I reckon yore hull don't fit just right. I could top him off for you, Lee. But you gotta learn to ride yore own rough string."

HAVEWELL'S lips tightened. He had been shanghaied, slapped, knocked down, chapped to a blister. And now he was being forced to ride a bucking horse. A trained bucker! He set his teeth. He had been stripped of everything but pride, and the will to hate. It was a bitter cup to drink, but drink it he knew he must. The look in this tall rider's dark eyes was proof of that.

Young Havewell tightened his belt. He limped to where the pinto stood waiting and gathered up the reins. He swung up, tightly gripping the saddlehorn. The pinto came uncocked, bellowing, sunfishing. Pulling leather didn't help, it only stiffened his body and his head began to snap. The pinto shook him loose and stacked him head-first on the mountain meadow grass. Leland sat up, bleeding at the nose.

"Go souse yore haid in the creek," advised Potluck. "Next time, keep his haid up. Grip him with yore laigs, but keep yore body slack. Yuh don't have to win no contest prize—just ride him."

While this was going on, the tinhorn had been struggling with his



Thousands of letters like this have been written to prove that **DRAFTING,** learned the American School way, **DOES PAY.** Here's work you will enjoy, for it's great to see some huge plant or immense building taking shape on the drawing board and the draftsman expects **STEADY WORK** for he is usually among the **first to be hired** and the last to be laid off. Why not get into drafting—have a profession instead of a trade?

Be a Draftsman—

Learn at home We train you thoroughly and expertly in the half hours you can spare from work or pleasure.

No need to burn midnight oil. Go as slow or as fast as your time will permit. Lessons are so clearly written that beginners can easily understand them and our system of **"practice study"** adds **EXTRA VALUE** to the instruction.

Use head and hands in this fascinating profession, to make **more money** and put yourself in line for promotion.

Write for **FREE** bulletin—there is no obligation of any kind.

O. C. MILLER, Secretary

AMERICAN SCHOOL

Dep't. DD97 Drexel at 58th Chicago

Make BIG MONEY UNDER NEW PREMIUM GIFT PLAN

Men! Women! Earn GOOD, YEAR ROUND INCOME and $500.00 YEARLY BONUS besides; operating quick money-making route in choice localities or working right from your home. Just give away valuable premiums and samples with famous quality Coffee, Spices, Soaps, Flavorings, etc.—over 300 everyday necessities. Big products and premiums display also furnished. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY. Part time workers also welcome. Just send penny postcard and also get FREE sample of Togstad's famous "Magic".

C. I. TOGSTAD CO. Dept. B-61 Kokomo, Indiana

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. Successful graduates in every section of the U. S. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 265-L Chicago

A Correspondence Institution

NOW a DYNAMIC HEAVY DUTY INDUSTRIAL WELDER

WORKS Off 110-Volt Light Socket. This marvelous **Dynamic** Power Welder does the work of much higher priced types. It is easily portable. **WELDS Cylinder Blocks, Bumpers, Fenders, Tanks, Farm Machinery, etc.** Will also solder and braze on the lightest material. Works on iron, steel, tin, brass, copper and all other metals. Men without previous experience can make as much as $5.00 on a one hour repair job. Go into business—Open a Welding Shop Now. **AGENTS**—Make big profits selling to garages, factories, janitors and machine shops. WRITE for 10-Day Trial Offer. **DYNAMIC WELDER COMPANY 2226-GH SILVERTON ROAD, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

for Only **$19.75** RETAIL

packs, under Tommy's watchful eye. By the time Leland returned from the creek, having stopped his nosebleed, the packs were in place and roped, and Tommy and Potluck had changed saddles to fresh mounts. They were ready, waiting to hit the trail.

Without a word, Leland Havewell tried again. This time he managed to stick on. The pinto was a wise bronc, not an outlaw. It answered to the bit, which was severe, biding its time. Leland had accomplished something, and he seemed to feel a bit better.

CHAPTER V

RUSTLERS ON THE OPEN RANGE

As they rode, cattle began to show, little scattered bunches, trailing slowly down from the higher range. They seemed to be expecting a change in the weather and were migrating to lower pastures, usually led by some old cow who remembered winter feed grounds where hay was stacked. But near noon, Potluck cut the trail of a good-sized bunch of cattle headed up a canyon, instead of down. There were no calves in this bunch. It was all beef; about fifty head, he judged. And there were horse tracks behind them, several days old.

"What do you make o' it, Lee?" he said.

Leland showed interest, but would not talk. He was dog tired, sagging in his saddle, yet compelled to watch the pinto, which showed signs of eagerness to drop its head and pitch.

Potluck shrugged, refraining from further comment. They rode on. However, when the trail of a second bunch of cattle joined the first, this an hour's riding farther on, he drew rein. They were now following at least a hundred head. He waited for Leland to study the sign. It was so clear a blind man could read it

with a cane. But the sky and sun were blotted out by lead-colored clouds and the cold wind was beginning to spit snow. This was what the rustlers had counted on—the first snowfall blotting out their trail. Here at these high elevations the snow might lay until spring.

Leland Havewell frowned. "Well? I've known all along someone was rustling my cattle."

"They may not all be yore cattle," Potluck pointed out.

"Of course they are," said Leland Havewell. "The Double X and the D Bar K wouldn't be rustling their own stock, would they? They've robbed me ever since I've been here."

"That's what you think," said Potluck. "Why not follow this trail and find out?"

"Who in hell are you, anyway?" demanded Leland Havewell.

"I ain't in hell—yet," Potluck grinned. "I'll tell you who I am when I've half a notion you'll believe me. At the moment I'm Potluck Jones, yore friend. Yuh know, I've got a hunch you'll make a cowhand, Lee."

"Not I!" Leland Havewell groaned. "I'm coming apart at every joint. I can't stick this out much longer. I can hire men to do this kind of work. Why should I be out here taking orders from you?"

"Shore yuh got money," said Potluck, "and yuh got responsibilities that go with it. Yuh can't hire any man that'll do yore job the way you'd do it yoreself. Yuh can hire men, but yuh gotta watch 'em. Anyway, let's trail this beef till dark, then camp. You'll feel better, soon as you get some hot coffee and grub inside you."

So they rode on, up into that cold bitterness where the backbone of the Rockies humped itself into the snow-laden sky. That night they made their camp in the shelter of a stand of lodgepole pines.

NEXT morning, snow had settled thickly on tarp-covered beds. Even Tommy grumbled. And Harry Clute bemoaned his luck. It cost Potluck an effort to chase up a grin, but he knew that, cold and miserable as he was, Leland Havewell was feeling the acid grind ten times worse. Leland was saddle sore, stiff as a rusty hinge, yet he rustled wood without a murmur and made himself useful in a number of ways.

Young Havewell was, in fact, beginning to set his teeth into this job of recovering the rustled cattle with the grim determination of a young pup discovering its first taste of raw meat. Virginia Dale had been wrong. The young owner of the Winged V did possess a backbone, and it was beginning to stiffen. Potluck could well afford to grin. The governor had been right about this young fellow.

That afternoon they topped the summit of a bleak pass, forcing their unwilling mounts into the teeth of a whirling blizzard, bucking drifts. The tracks they followed had long since been blotted out. But this was a natural trail, though little used, and Potluck led the way with confidence.

Night forced them into timber, where the horses, trail-weary and gaunt, were tethered in the lee of a thicket of young pines and fed a little grain from the packs. The tinhorn gambler, the millionaire's son, and the two thinly clad Arizona ramblers all worked together with numbed hands throwing up a pole-and-pine-bough shelter against the cutting lash of wind-driven snow.

It was such a trail, and such weather as to try the ardor and courage of any man. Potluck appreciated the reason why Wyoming buckaroos and Montana punchers wore blanket-lined Angora chaps. Of the four, Tommy was the only one with chaps of any kind.

Not until three days later did they sight the stolen herd, now numbering about five hundred head, Potluck judged. It was moving steadily north across Wyoming's high sage and cedar-stippled tableland; pointed toward the U. P. Railroad and loading chutes, without doubt. Potluck looked back.

In the far background was the snow-covered Park Range, and somewhere between was the Colorado line. Here in Wyoming, he was well aware, his authority did not equal that of a sheepherder. He turned to Leland Havewell, mounted on the pinto bucker.

"Waal, Lee, it's up to you, amigo," Potluck grinned.

Leland Havewell squinted his eyes off across the distance to where four riders pushed the strung-out herd across a high range blanketed under a skift of glistening snow, dazzling in the sunlight.

"Gimme some shells that'll fit my gun," Leland said. He was leading and filling his belt when Tommy and Harry Clute hazed the string of horses up. "You better stay with our cavvy, Harry," the Winged V owner said crisply.

Tommy and Potluck exchanged glances. Riding forward, the three warmed their hands under armpits, then had a look at their guns. Leland watched his two companions jack shells into their rifle barrels, and add shells to their magazines.

"You didn't tell me to bring a Winchester along," he grinned. "I'm offering a hundred dollars for one."

"Money couldn't buy this smoke pole," said Potluck.

"Mine either," Tommy O'Neil grinned. "Ain't that just too bad? Lee, you corral those hombres! Me an' Potluck'll knock 'em down."

"Are you sure those are my cattle?" Leland demanded.

Potluck grinned. "When we ride up, if them gents start throwin' lead or try to make a run for it, we'll know they're rustlers, and no mistake. Don't be surprised, Lee, if yuh find they're part o' yore Winged V crew. Just pay 'em off with lead change, and be done with 'em."

THE man riding point dropped back around the herd. The two at swing did likewise, joining the one at the drag. All four rode bunched, looking back uncertainly, watching the three riders who came up from behind, fast.

The distance shortened. Suddenly the four pulled rifles from saddle boots, reined about and came charging back, shooting as they came.

Leland Havewell ducked his head.

"Yuh can't dodge 'em, Lee," Potluck grinned. "When yuh hear 'em whistle, they're already past yore haid." Then he raised in his stirrups and began to return the fire.

Tommy's rifle was *spanging* sharply. Potluck saw a rustler's hat fly off, another spill backward from his charging mount. Sun glared on snow. His chestnut buck-jumped sage. The rustlers were poor shots. Potluck's rifle clicked—empty. With the whine of lead in his ears, he drew his six-shooter, reining up short. The distance was fifty yards. Three rustlers were charging in. Too-bad was pulling his silver-mounted Colts. But the pinto's saddle was empty. Leland Havewell was down!

With a rocketing blare of six-gun shots, the hard-case Winged V rustlers finished their charge. They met a scorching blast of lead. It rocked them from saddles as snorting horses thundered past. They dropped into the sage, sodden, crumpled objects, to catapult and roll, then lay still. It was rustlers' pay-off!

Tommy O'Neil sat his big roan, a smoking gun in either hand. "Danged warm while it lasted," he observed.

"They got Lee!" Potluck told him.

"Name o' a mule!" ejaculated Tommy. His expression changed.

They wheeled their mounts and rode back. Leland Havewell lay limp on the frozen, snow-covered ground. They sprang down, gently turning him on his back. He opened his eyes and sat up dazedly.

"Where you hit, Lee?" Potluck questioned.

Leland shook his head. "That damned pinto bucked me off again!" he said.

"Shucks!" ejaculated Potluck, vastly relieved. "Lee, ain't you ever goin' to learn to ride that hoss?"

"To hell with you!" Leland retorted. But he was smiling.

Potluck caught up the pinto. Leland short-reined the bronc and mounted, a lump beginning to show on his forehead where he had struck the ground.

The cattle, all prime beef, were in the Winged V iron. But the greater part of them wore either a vented Double X brand or a vented D Bar K. The dead rustlers were easily identified as Winged V riders, but Speed Sorrels was not among them.

"Lee," said Potluck, "this puts you behind the eight ball. Yore foreman has been ventin' brands and sellin' rustled beef under yore iron and name; robbin' you, same as yore neighbors. I don't know how the law will look at it. A good lawyer might pull you out o' this, maybe."

"I don't need a lawyer!" declared Leland Havewell vigorously. "I'll make good to my neighbors whatever my folly has cost them. But I can't make good for some other things, like Joel Redsull being killed. I wish I could!"

"Now that," said Potluck, "listens mighty good, Lee. See here, I doubt if we can put this beef back up through that snow. Why not push 'em on into Wamsetter, the way they're headed. We can tally 'em up and ship 'em. Later, you can make good to Cleve Crouse and Ivan Dale. I'll send the governor a wire and mention how it is. He can hold a powwow with the Governor o' Wyomin' and put us in the clear, I reckon. How about it?"

"You know the governor?" asked Leland Havewell, surprised.

Potluck grinned. "Well enough so he gave Too-bad and me a couple little silver ornaments to pin on our vests, just in case we need 'em."

"But we never need 'em," put in Tommy.

"That's right," agreed Harry Clute, as one who knew.

LATE that afternoon, Potluck and Leland rode into Wamsetter, leaving Tommy and Harry Clute to bring in the herd. Potluck was anxious to see about ordering cattle cars and to make the necessary arrangements about shipping.

Wamsetter was of no great size. First they passed a saloon, with the usual pile of beer kegs stacked at one corner next the street. A little

beyond was a combination hotel and eating house. The depot was farther along and across the wide street. They were almost opposite the hotel, walking their mounts toward the depot, when Leland suddenly stiffened.

"Look out!" he warned, pointing to a skulking figure half hidden behind the far corner of the hotel. "That's one of my riders!"

His warning came not a split second too soon. The man at the hotel's corner fired pointblank at Potluck. But Potluck had already spurred into sudden motion. The whizzing bullet missed him. However, the gunshot touched off the pinto.

Whirling, it downed its head, bucking back along the street. A few jumps took it beyond the saloon where Leland, gun in hand, went high into the air to stack up in the street. He flattened out and shook his head, his eyes narrowed.

What Lee saw was Speed Sorrels behind the pile of beer kegs next to the saloon. From behind this barricade Sorrels was lining his deadly guns on Potluck Jones, whose chestnut gelding was in erratic movement as Potluck shot it out with the hard case at the hotel corner. Even as Lee leveled his own gun across his left forearm, Sorrels threw a pair of shots that missed. Lee was badly shaken by his fall. Things were happening pretty fast for him, but nevertheless he took his own good time about triggering his gun. The result of his shot surprised him. The bullet took Speed Sorrels just above the ear. The Winged V range boss never knew what hit him. He crumpled to the ground—dead!

In this brief interval of time, Potluck had finished his own gun fight at the hotel corner, leaving the hard case dead in his boots. Potluck came riding back, his restless chestnut stepping broadside along the street.

"Lee," said Potluck, "can't you stick on that bronc yet?"

"To hell with you!" retorted young Havewell, climbing shakily to his feet. "I didn't get throwed this time. I fell off! I can't shoot on that damned pinto!"

"Yeah, so I notice," said Potluck. "But when you spread-eagle, you do a danged good job." He rode over to where Speed Sorrels lay behind the beer kegs, blood trickling from his head into the trampled snow. "Lee, you ain't no bronc-twister yet, but I gotta admit you're no slouch at sidin' a pard in a tight. Yuh throw a danged good gun!"

Lee was trembling like a kid, awed at having killed a man—one of the fastest, deadliest gun-slingers on the range.

"I—I never expected to run into my range boss way over here," he said.

"Neither did I," Potluck admitted. "There wasn't a fresh track leadin' in here. Sorrels and that other gent must have ridden in before the snow quit blowin', I reckon. At any rate, he was waitin' for that rustled beef to come in, so he could ship 'em. Anyway, this just about buttons up our job. Shucks! I hope we don't get throwed in jail. I gotta date for the barbecue."

"What barbecue?" queried Havewell, eying the town marshal, who was approaching.

"Don't you aim to throw a get-together at the Winged V, amigo?" Potluck grinned.

"It's an idea. We'll throw a good one!" Lee replied. "Potluck, don't you worry about getting arrested. They can't jail a man for shooting a rustler!" he declared loftily. Pot-

luck smiled. Leland Havewell had sure learned a lot.

CHAPTER VI

A FULL-FLEDGED BUCKAROO

THE day set for the barbecue dawned bright and clear, with just enough fall crimp in the air to make folks hungry. All the folks in North Park had gathered at the Winged V on Middle Fork.

The snow-whitened peaks of the Park Range and the Bow Mountains were like silent spectators looking down into the vast sweep of the colossal amphitheater below where an enormous beef, stuck through from head to tail on a huge steel spit, roasted slowly above the glowing pit midway between the oversized frame house and the great hip-roofed barn.

Everything had been made ready the day before. The pit fire had been lighted at midnight. Tommy, an artist at mixing hot sauce, had taken the job in hand. First the beef had been given a fiery bath in *chilo-ajo*. Now it was being basted from a washtub brimming full of tomatoes, minced garlic, peppers, herbs and whatnot, mixed according to Tommy's own private formula. The basting had been going on for hours.

It was being done by Harry Clute, and for this purpose the tinhorn

DIESELS

PREPARE FOR TOMORROW'S OPPORTUNITY

This is your opportunity to qualify as a Diesel Engineer. Men with practical training are in demand for good-paying, responsible positions. You can qualify for a place in this rapidly growing industry.

TESTED TRAINING—REAL SHOP EXPERIENCE

Internal Combustion Engines—Automotive Service

National Schools give you actual shop methods. You learn on the latest and best equipment in a million-dollar trade school. You are taught to make good and helped to make good after you graduate. It will pay you to investigate National's Master Course.

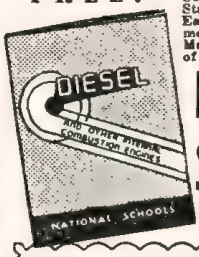
FREE!

Transportation Allowed to Los Angeles

Coach railroad fare allowed from any point in the United States.

Earn room and board while learning. Graduate employment cooperation.

Mail coupon for new 40-page Book of Diesel Facts, details of training, employment opportunities.



NATIONAL SCHOOLS LOS ANGELES

Request for FREE BOOK

NATIONAL SCHOOLS
Dept. 2-BS 4000 So. Figueroa St., Los Angeles, Calif.

NAME_____ AGE____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

FREE ENLARGEMENT

Just to get acquainted, we will beautifully enlarge a negative (film) of your favorite Kodak picture, photo or snapshot to 5x7 inches FREE—if you enclose this ad with 10c for return mailing. Information on hand tinting in natural colors FREE with a frame, sent immediately. Your original returned with your free enlargement. Look over your snapshots now and send the negative today as this free offer is limited. DEAN STUDIOS, Dept. 222, 118 N. 15th St., Omaha, Nebr.

★ GET ON "UNCLE SAM'S" PAYROLL ★

Many 1939 Appointments Expected

$1260 TO $2100 FIRST YEAR

Common Education Usually Sufficient

Short Hours—Vacations With Pay

MEN—WOMEN

Mail Coupon immediately—today sure. Hurry.

TEAR HERE

FRANKLIN INST., Dept. G194, Rochester, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Rush to me, without charge, 32 page Civil Service book with list of U. S. Government big paid positions obtainable. Advise me also regarding salaries, hours, work, vacation, etc. Tell me how to qualify for one of these positions.

Name.....

Address.....

SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT

Every hour, day and night, 4,080 people are disabled through sickness and accident. You never know when tragedy strikes. **The Policy of the Century** comes to your aid at the time of your most dire need—at a time when you are down, financially handicapped, unable to care for your loved ones.

THE POLICY OF THE CENTURY

WILL HELP PAY YOUR BILLS

THE CENTURY POLICY
Pays Up To $7,500.00
Accidental Death $7,500.00
Loss of Hands, Feet, or Eyes
$25 PER WEEK FOR SICKNESS
$25 PER WEEK FOR ACCIDENT
$100 EMERGENCY ALLOWANCE
COST TO YOU ONLY $1 PER MONTH

The Federal Life and Casualty Company, a legal reserve insurance company which has paid millions of dollars to policy holders, offers you the new "CENTURY" Policy. This company is not an association or assessment company. Old, reliable. It is approved by state insurance departments. Be safe! Costs only $1 per month. Just mail coupon.

INSURES MEN AND WOMEN

The new "Century" Sickness and Accident Policy insures both men and women with the benefits shown, plus many other liberal features outlined in the policy.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Anyone between 16 and 70 can apply. No medical examination. No agent will call.

SEND NO MONEY Remember you do not send one cent—just mail the coupon below. Don't delay—do this today!

MAIL COUPON NOW

FEDERAL LIFE & CASUALTY COMPANY
CENTURY POLICY DEPT., INC., SUITE 66-B
ELGIN TOWER, ELGIN, ILL.

NO AGENT WILL CALL

Please mail me at once complete information and how to get the "Century" Policy for my Free Inspection without obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed.

47c 3 for $1.00

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage — or send 49c with order and we pay postage. **Big 16x20-inch enlargement** sent C.O.D. 78c plus postage or send 80c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS, 113 S. Jefferson St., Dept. 769-B, Chicago

BECOME AN EXPERT

BOOKKEEPER

New, *better* bookkeeping opportunities opening every day. Jobs that pay well—and lead to still better jobs. We train you to get them—and keep them! Previous training not necessary. C.P.A. instructors cover everything from the ground up. Inexpensive. Write for free book and special terms. No obligation. Address:

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 265-H Chicago, Ill.
A Correspondence Institution

Now! ANYONE CAN *Easily* CUT NEW TREAD on OLD TIRES

WITH THIS **SIMPLE INVENTION**

NOW! YOU CAN, without previous experience, RE-GROOVE THE EXACT TREAD on old tires and put new tread on bald tires with the **Re-Nu Tire Groover**, a sturdy device that does a first class job quickly, yet the price is so low anyone can afford it. **RE-NU TIRE GROOVING** insures quick stopping and road-gripping tread to give traction where needed. POSITIVELY GUARANTEED to satisfy or costs nothing to try. **MAKE BIG MONEY FOR YOURSELF** regrooving tires for your friends and neighbors and supplying this necessary invention to tire shops, garages, service stations, fleet and car owners. Get yours free now for helping to introduce it. **RE-NU TIRE GROOVER Co. 2815-BG Michigan, Chicago**

used a new broom, swabbing down the crisping sides of the beef, evenly and at frequent intervals. One had only to look at the young gambler's face to understand the complete transformation he had undergone. Wind and weather, the glare of sun on snow, had tanned his features to a nut-brown. His hands, once sleek and slender, no longer looked capable of cleverly manipulating a poker deck and dealing seconds or from the bottom. Yet, strangely enough, Harry Clute did not seem to mind. It was clear that he was having a good time.

In fact, that seemed to be the order of the day. Women bustled about, in and out of the big house. Long tables were loaded until they groaned with great loaves of home bread, cakes of all sizes, shapes and variety of frosting, spiced pickles, jellies, jams, and fruit preserves, brown doughnuts, and sugar cookies.

The corrals were full of horses, the yard was full of light wagons and buckboards, where kids played tag, trying to see who could yell the loudest. Stockmen, without their guns for the first time in months, moved about, shaking hands and grinning at each other. There was liquor to be had, but you couldn't have started a gun fight if you tried. Not with the tang of wood smoke and the soul-satisfying odor of barbecuing steer meat kindling men's hunger.

It was nearing noon. The steer had reached that stage of crisping, juice-dripping perfection when the last touch of flavoring was desired. Tommy tossed some green sagebrush into the pit and thick, fragrant smoke rolled up, smothering the barbecue from sight. With Virginia Dale near and watching, Potluck and Leland Havewell rolled up their sleeves and commenced to whet their carving knives.

"No Winged V steer ever died a more glorious death," laughed Virginia, her blue eyes sparkling.

"Lee aims to buy yore buckin' pinto," Potluck told her, his dark eyes full of humor.

The Winged V owner grinned. Riding and the strenuous trip just completed had made him almost as lean and strong as Potluck.

"We're having a dance tonight, Virginia. Will you save me a few?" he said to the girl.

"Of course I will, Lee," she smiled, watching the sage smoke roll away with the down-valley breeze.

A good half mile down wind, two noses started twitching—the governor's and Warford Havewell's. The breeze carried a most savory tang, awakening old taste buds, urging them into full blossom like flowers in spring. They were both big men, and well filled the buckboard's seat. The millionaire's pink, plump, freshly shaved face took on an infatuated smile. He sniffed again.

"Governor!" he exclaimed. "Do you smell it?"

The governor's blue eyes twinkled. His time-weathered features broke into a grin. "Waal, I reckon! It's pit-roaster beef, old son!" he declared, then urgently slapped the two broncs with the reins. "Smells like we're arrivin' just in the nick o' time!"

They wheeled along at a good fast clip, appetites sharpening. At the Winged V, the governor pulled up, driving slowly into the ranchyard, studying the crowd gathered around the barbecue pit where Potluck and Lee were cutting away great slices of juicy roast, heaping them upon the huge platter Virginia was holding. His blue eyes brightened with satisfaction.

"He's quite some man," said the governor, pointing. "Quite some man!"

"He is that!" declared Havewell, proudly viewing his son. "Look at all the friends he has! Right among them, isn't he? Just look at that girl, governor! Don't she make you feel young? What ails that boy? Why don't he marry her? Is he blind?"

"Blind?" The governor looked hard at Potluck. "I reckon not. Nothing ails him as I can see. There's no better gal in the State than Virginia Dale, but I wasn't thinkin' he'd be getting married. I had other plans!"

"But it's high time he was settling down," said Havewell, beaming at his son. "He's cost me scads of money. But he's worth every cent of it! See how lean and brown and fit he looks. There's nothing like ranch life to develop a real man, eh, governor?"

A little puzzled, the governor turned to look at his friend. It was becoming clear that their talk was running out of point. As if suddenly struck with the same idea, Havewell turned to face the governor.

"Is it possible we're not talking about the same young man?" Havewell suggested.

Being a smart cowman and a clever politician, the governor chuckled. "Old son, it's time we grab a hunk o' beef and growl," he replied heartily, and scrambled from the buckboard to the ground.

Warford Havewell, being likewise smart and clever, was not deceived. He delayed a moment, his keen eyes now dwelling with interest on the clean-cut face and slender figure of Potluck Jones, the man Colorado's governor had been pointing out.

THE END.

Aces Come High

Continued from page 98

pink outfit. But when he rode to her, he began to laugh. And she began to bite her lips and turn scarlet.

"Oh! You make me so angry!" she flamed out at him.

He didn't even say, "But I haven't done anything! I haven't even said a word!" He just chuckled.

"Oh!" she burst out, her small clenhed fist pounding at the horn of her saddle. "I could kill you!"

"And so, Rita *mia,* you came all the way over here to see me? Are you going to shoot me or use a knife or—"

"Will you never be serious? Not even for one little minute? Not at a time like this?"

"Like this? Like what?"

Romero had stopped at what he no doubt held to be a discreet distance, yet it was not far enough to suit her. She saw that he had his old head tipped aside so as to bring his good ear toward them, and she gave him a look and a gesture which caused him to withdraw another score of paces.

"Señor Haveril," said Rita, her voice as cool and aloof as she could make it, "you can be very sure that I should not have come to see you unless I felt myself compelled to do so. I want you to understand that."

He saw that she was deeply, tragically in earnest.

"Señor," she went on, "I did not come for foolishness, I tell you! You are going to listen and I am going to tell you— *No matter what happens, you must not come to Paradise Valley!*"

"Why should I want to come," he teased, "as long as you come here!"

"I am not going to come again, ever! And you know it. But you must do what I say. You will not come to our valley." Thus far she had commanded. Suddenly she was begging. "Promise me. Promise me that one little thing, Señor Ross Haveril! That no power on earth can make you come!"

"Now I don't get this," said Haveril, and he grew as serious as she was. "What's happened? What are you afraid of? Why shouldn't I go wherever I damn well please?"

"I can't tell you everything! I can just tell you that, I can just warn you—"

"Warn?" he caught her up. "That means I can look for trouble if I set foot in your valley?"

"Mr. Roberts—Bob Roberts, the man from the mines who was your friend—he is dead now, no, señor? Do you want to be like that?" She was as tense as a reed shivering in a wind. "They—" she blurted out, "They are going to kill you! If you come to Paradise Valley it will be because you are invited there—and someone will kill you there. Now I have told you."

SHE plucked her reins taut at that and swung her horse as though to send it into headlong flight. But he had read her purpose in her eyes and in the timbre of her voice, and shot his hand out, catching her horse's bit and yanking it to a standstill, so close to his that his knee and hers brushed.

"We'll have the rest of this," he said. "Who is going to invite me? Your uncle, of course. And who is going to have a try at popping a bullet or a knife into me? The same Don Rodriguez de Valdez y Munoz?"

"No, no, no! Maybe he will in-

vite you, for you are a neighbor and you have just come back and it would be courteous for him to ask you to have dinner sometime. But it is not he who—he is not the one—"

"You are going to tell me all about it," said Haveril. "How do you happen to know or whether you are just imagining things, and who it is that you think is out for my scalp, and why the devil Valdez is the one to ask me to drop in and be butchered? Now, let's have it."

"You must not ask me!" the girl cried, terror in her voice. "I could never tell you. But I know! And I am frightened and I have come to tell you." All the stiffness went out of her and she began to sag in the saddle. She looked very weary and sad and hopeless. "And you must not tell that I came and said these things to you."

Reluctantly he withdrew his hand from her horse's bit.

"I get part of it. That uncle of yours is a scoundrel but not a murderer. Just a petty scoundrel. Somebody's tool, maybe? Well, Tom Storm's, for a bet! Why not?" He shrugged. "Time will tell as usual, being a blab-mouth sooner or later. Well, I have you to thank, Señorita Rita. You're quite a girl."

"And I have your promise then?" she asked eagerly. "You will keep away from our rancho? No matter what, you will stay away?"

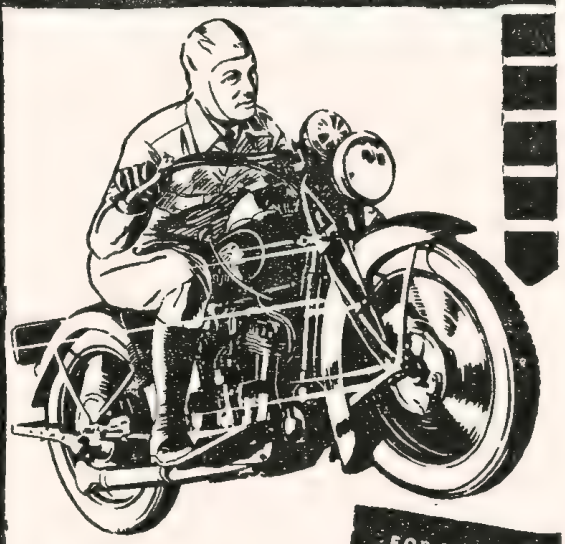
At first she had only the glint in his eyes for answer. Then he said easily, "What do *you* think?"

CHAPTER XV

A NEW FRIEND

SECRET VALLEY came out of its Rip van Winkle sleep all of a sudden. A crew of carpenters and masons brought up from Liberty went to work on the old Haveril house making it a pleasant place to dwell in. And an ugly old Chinese cook, called Buttercup, in-

THRILLS OF THE OPEN ROAD ARE YOURS!



Indian JUNIOR SCOUT

F.O.B. FACTORY $215. FULLY EQUIPPED

AMERICA'S LOWEST PRICED "TWIN"

A mighty motorcycle at a midget price to bring you sport, adventure, fun! Junior Scout's easy handling, flashy getaway, zooming power and economy of operation make it America's greatest motorcycle "buy." With three other famous Indian models, refined and improved for 1939. Your Indian dealer has a pay-as-you-ride plan. See him today!

INDIAN — America's fastest stock motorcycle!

FREE!

A year's subscription to thrilling Indian News for the price of mailing. Handsome Indian Sport Jersey when you order your new Indian motorcycle. Mail coupon today!

INDIAN MOTOCYCLE CO., Springfield, Mass.

Please send me items checked [ ] Indian News for one year (I enclose 15c in stamps to cover mailing cost). [ ] Certificate of Value entitling me to Indian Sport Jersey FREE when I order my new Indian motorcycle. [ ] Indian catalog.

Name .....

Address .....

..... BSG29

Please be sure to check your age group
[ ] 16-19 yrs. [ ] 20-30 yrs. [ ] 31 yrs. and up [ ] under 16 yrs.

INDIAN MOTOCYCLE CO., Springfield, Mass.

MYSTERIOUS DEVICE WELDS BRAZES AND SOLDERS
ANYONE CAN OPERATE

Now, an electric welding, brazing and soldering Torch, complete with power unit, goggles and supplies. **Works INSTANTLY off any light socket.** Does a thousand and one repair jobs at amazingly LOW COST on aluminum, iron, steel and other metals. **Indispensable** for Auto, Body and Fender Repairs, and home repairs—shop, factory, farm, engineer, janitor, sheet metal, radio and bicycle repairs. Anyone can handle without previous experience with our simple instructions. **10-DAY HOME TRIAL**
Write at once for Special Introductory Low Price Offer. Try 3 in 1 Electric Torch for 10 days at our risk, or get one free by helping to introduce it. **ELECTRO-TORCH CO., 2613-CK Michigan Ave., Chicago**

TYPEWRITER Brand NEW!

Only $19.95 and up
10-Day Trial—Easy Terms
Guaranteed Brand New latest REMINGTON CADET model only $19.95 during this sensational sale. Also Royal, Corona and famous Featherweight Portables at real money-saving prices. Also standard full size office models rebuilt and fully guaranteed at ½ saving.
20c A DAY
231 W. Monroe St.
International Typewriter Exch., Dept. 212, Chicago

SELL SUITS ON OUR EASY CREDIT PLAN
FREE SUITS and Pants given as Bonus
Besides Large Cash Profits, Premiums and Gifts.

Sell only (5) suits to get a FREE SUIT. No limit to number of FREE garments you may earn. Wholesale Prices $17.99 and up. Sample line FREE. No experience needed to make easy sales. All garments individually cut and tailored to measure. Satisfaction or money-back guarantee.

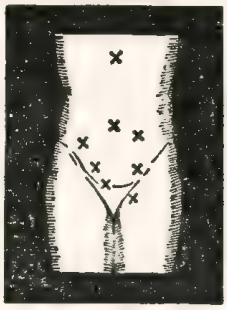
SQUARE DEAL TAILORING CO., Inc.
316 W. VAN BUREN ST., Dept. EC-1, CHICAGO, ILL.

High School Course at Home
Many Finish in 2 Years
Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied — Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dpt. H27, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

AMAZING GROFLEX SHOES NEED NO BREAKING IN
EARN BIG COMMISSIONS AND
YOUR OWN SHOES FREE
AS BONUS WITHOUT EXTRA COST
Sell outstanding line—men's, women's, children's shoes. 175 Spring Styles with amazing health features, including famous KUSHIONTRED and self-adjusting arch support. Offer shirts, ties, hosiery as bonus to customers. No experience needed. Big Sample Outfit furnished at no cost. Write TODAY for full information and FREE SELLING KIT.
TANNERS SHOE CO., 931 Boston, Mass.

WRITE FOR FREE OUTFIT

Is Your Rupture HERE?



Why continue to suffer with rupture? Stop your worries and fears. Send for the facts about my perfected truss invention—the Brooks Appliance for reducible rupture—with the automatic AIR-CUSHION support that **gives Nature a chance to close the opening.** Thousands bought by doctors for themselves and patients.

Sent on Trial—Made-to-measure, individual fitting for man, woman or child. Low-priced, sanitary, durable. No obnoxious springs or hard pads; no metal girdle to rust. Safe and comfortable. Helps Nature get results. Not sold through stores—beware of imitations. Write today for full information sent free in plain sealed envelope.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO. 408-A State St. Marshall, Mich.

stalled himself in the kitchen with something like forty assorted butcher knives and made the mountain air fragrant in a new way with the aromas floating out of his always wide-opened windows.

Ross Haveril gave Luke Oliver the money to pay off the mortgage that Tom Storm held, and Luke went alone one morning to Lost Valley and had his few gleeful moments shoving the money over to Storm and killing the lien. So Luke, much to his satisfaction, again became what he had been those many years ago, foreman of Secret Valley.

"Me, kid, I like it a heap better this way," he said. "I wouldn't ever have took the place off your dad in the first place only he was dead when he gave it to me and you were off gallivanting. Now long's I live I'm going to run things here, and if you don't like my ways I'll boot you over the mountain. And when I'm dead, all my share goes back to you."

Ross laughed heartily. "You dead! Why, you old heller, you're so tough you'll never die."

"Hope so," said Luke. "It's kind of fun living, ain't it, kid? Nowadays, I mean."

The workmen finished revamping the house; the fences got straightened up and a new corral came into being. Ross sent for new trees to be planted. Luke rode fifty miles to Big Buffalo and bought up a herd of young stock.

The days drifted by, and Ross, with both hands full at the ranch, let extraneous matters alone, taking cognizance of them only on the outer fringes of his thoughts.

True, he did not forget Bob Roberts, and consequently he meditated on Bull Strake's and Storm's more-than-likely connection with the affair—and on Rita's warning. But for once in his life he did not hurry into things which, as he saw them, would keep. Neither Bull Strake

nor Tom Storm was going to jump fences getting out of the country. And there had as yet come no messenger from the Valdez rancho inviting him to enact the roll of Dilly, Dilly, come-and-be-killed.

"I can't get it," he mused. "I don't know why that little Spanish rooster has got it in for me—"

"You took his hundred dollars," Luke reminded, "when he thought you were flat busted. Then he found out you had more money than he had. I'll bet a man he didn't die laughing over that."

"But he wouldn't want to slit a man's gullet for that sort of monkey business. And even if he did, why should he want to do the act on his own land where folks would be figuring it was his job of work? Likely, that little devil Rita made the story up."

"No," said Luke. "Don't you fool yourself. That girl isn't the sort to run around playing jokes. You can tell with one good look at her that she takes life serious." He regarded Haveril over the rim of his spectacles. "What about your new love life, kid, with those two crazy youngsters, the señorita and Black Jack's girl, slithering into it? Look out for if one of 'em don't get your scalp, the other will. They know by now you got money in your pants pocket."

Ross grinned. "How about a little run-in on Black Jack again? We sort of owe him money, Luke, and we haven't droped in for quite a spell."

"No more of the Mountain House if you've got half the sense the good Lord gave geese," said Luke severely. "How you got away with what you did the other time, I don't know. Black Jack and his house are as crooked as a dog's hind leg that's been kicked by a mule."

"You might be right for once in your life," Ross conceded. And with other matters on his mind he would not have thought about the Mountain House again for awhile had it not been that the very next day a man rode down into the valley with a message that Black Jack Devlin was again in funds and would be glad any time to give Haveril a run for his money.

SO that night, groomed and immaculate in his new silk shirt and boots and wide black hat, Ross Haveril showed up at the Mountain House. Luke said, "No thanks, not me," when Ross invited him to come along.

Ross found the set-up much as he had on his former visit, save that Tom Storm wasn't there and Bob Roberts was missing. But Black Jack Devlin was on deck, sleekly handsome as always, and so was Rose-alba, back at the faro layout. Hannigan dispensed fiery liquor and sad-eyed Jimmy Weaver tinkled the piano sentimentally, and Doc tempted everyone to come over to the roulette table.

Rose Devlin's eyes clung curiously to Haveril's, and for the moment he allowed himself to be drowned in their shadowy depths. She did not smile, nor did he. They just looked at each other. But almost immediately his attention was drawn elsewhere.

At a small round poker table a red-thatched man sat alone, bottle and glass before him and a tiny stack of gold pieces which he kept chinking. He was a vast sort of man, as surly an individual as Ross ever remembered having seen. He was Grove Jordan, a cousin of Bull Strake's.

The man's glowering eyes rested on Ross Haveril. "Gambler, are

you?" he said, and toppled over his golden stack. "Well, I'll take you on, flipping a coin, heads or tails, twenty dollars to the shot."

For a second only Ross was of two minds. Then he stepped promptly over to Grove Jordan's table.

"Flip the coin," he said. "I'll call it while it's in the air."

The red-headed giant shot a coin aloft from a horny thumbnail.

"Tails!" called Ross while the yellow disk was still on its upward flight.

It came down on the table and lay flat. Grove Jordan gave it the briefest glance, then scooped it up and threw it at Haveril.

"Take it," he mutterd. "I'll get you the next time."

"Hey, there!" Ross slammed the coin back on the table. "I called it tails."

"Tails it was!"

"It was heads! It's your win."

"Why, damn you! It was tails and nothing else."

"You grabbed it too quick. I saw it. It's not mine, I tell you. It was heads."

"You're a damned liar!" Grove bellowed. He put both hands on the table, surging up erect.

"Liar yourself," retorted Haveril.

GROVE JORDAN, leaning forward, doubled up a fist and struck first. Haveril swayed lightly to one side, dodged the blow and delivered his own square on the chin to send Jordan crashing to the flood. Only then did Ross Haveril see that he had bowled over a one-legged man. With Jordan behind the table he had not realized that the big man had lost his right leg, high up, and wore a clumsy wooden stump. Now that the man lay sprawling on the floor, struggling awkwardly to get up, it was simple enough to see what ailed him—physically and otherwise.

Ross Haveril's face went red. He opened his mouth to say, "Hell, man, I didn't know! Why didn't you tell me?" His impulse was to help Jordon up. But with fine instinct he caught himself.

Jordan at last succeeded in getting to his feet. He advanced toward Ross.

"I won't fight you," said Ross quietly. "We haven't any quarrel."

"You're a dirty coward. I'll jerk this stump off and club you to death."

Haveril saw the fire in the fellow's eyes and knew how he felt. But he wouldn't give in entirely.

"All right," he yielded. "But we fight on even terms. Either I'll stand on one leg while we do it or we'll sit in chairs or we'll lie on the floor. And then I'd enjoy the job of beating the merry hell out of you."

By this time Hannigan was on the job, stepping softly, a hand behind his back and in that hand the persuader he had used more than once. Black Jack, too, came forward.

"Haveril is right, Grove," he said. "You two have no fight. You claim he won. He claims you did, that's all. Just a mistake."

"Mistake, hell!" roared Jordan. "He'll say next I've got only one leg and no eyes at all. I tell you it was tails! I saw it."

"It was heads," said Ross.

Rose Devlin was watching them. "Two men like them," she thought, "fighting because each says the other won! They're both crazy!"

Grove Jordan came stumping on, close up to Ross Haveril, fury reddening his eyes.

"You're going to finish this or you're a yellow dog," he yelled.

Then of a sudden Ross Haveril

began to laugh. He found himself liking this sore-headed giant. Other men began grinning, too. It was a queer sort of quarrel, as Black Jack had said, and it now impressed the onlookers as downright funny. They started laughing, slapping their hats against their dusty thighs until the room was in a genial uproar. And Grove Jordan, looking stupid and sullen, was the only man with an ugly face.

"Look here, Grove," chuckled Ross. "We just got off to a wrong start. How about a drink together and to hell with the twenty?"

Jordan's huge fists were clenched tight, and a look of murder was stamped all over his face—but suddenly a slow grin spread his big mouth. He opened his right hand.

"Put it there, kid. We'll have the drink. Only it's on me—"

"Like hell it is!" said Ross.

"Damn you," boomed Grove, and then they both began laughing together and went up to the bar, arms about each other's shoulders. Ross Haveril did not play at Black Jack's that night, but took Grove Jordan along home with him to Secret Valley, making a new friend.

Then at last came word from Don Rodriguez de Valdez y Munoz. One of his cowhands came riding over and brought word of a fiesta and barbecue. He made it clear that whereas everybody was invited, in

Back Pain and Kidney Strain

Wrong foods and drinks, worry, overwork and colds often put a strain on the Kidneys and functional kidney disorders may be the true cause of Excess Acidity, Getting Up Nights, Burning Passages, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, and Puffy Eyelids. Help your kidneys purify your blood with **Cystex**. Usually the very first dose starts helping your kidneys clean out excess acids and this soon may make you feel like new again. Under the money-back guarantee **Cystex** must satisfy completely or cost nothing. Get **Cystex** (siss-tex) today. It costs only 3c a dose at druggists and the guarantee protects you.

Get your copy **"MARCH OF DIESEL"** *Colorful-Interesting highly Illustrated*

TELLS about the many new uses for Diesel engines—about Hemphill Diesel, and Diesel-electric, training programs, which can be started at home. Get your free copy NOW—no obligation.

Hemphill Diesel Schools are America's original exclusive Diesel training institution.

SEND COUPON TO NEAREST ADDRESS

free

HEMPHILL DIESEL SCHOOLS

Please rush free "March of Diesel" and information on your Diesel courses.

NAME_____ AGE_____

STREET_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

OCCUPATION_____ m-35-ts

HEMPHILL DIESEL SCHOOLS LOCATED IN THESE CITIES:

BOSTON 134 Brookline Avenue · NEW YORK 31-40 Queens Boulevard, L.I.C. · DETROIT 2355 West Lafayette Boulevard · CHICAGO 2038 Larrabee Street · MEMPHIS 457 Monroe Avenue · LOS ANGELES 2129 San Fernando Road · SEATTLE 517 Westlake No. · VANCOUVER B. C. 1369 Granville Street

Classified Advertising

Detectives—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Work home or travel. DETECTIVE particulars free. Experience unnecessary. Write GEORGE WAGONER, 2640-A Broadway, New York.

DETECTIVES—SECRET INVESTIGATIONS—TRAINING. Home—Travel. Particulars Free. Chief Mullica, 577-S Orpheum Bldg., Jersey City.

Patents Secured

PATENTS—Reasonable terms. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 513, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS SECURED. Two valuable booklets sent free. Write immediately: Victor J. Evans & Co., 110-C Victor Building, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Time counts—Don't risk delay in patenting your invention. Write for new 48-page free booklet, "Patent Guide for the Inventor". No charge for preliminary information. Clarence A. O'Brien and Hyman Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 37-M Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

HAVE YOU a sound, practical invention for sale, patented or unpatented? If so, write Chartered Institute of American Inventors, Dept. 19-A, Washington, D. C.

Old Gold and Money Wanted

GOLD $35 OUNCE. Ship old gold teeth, crowns, jewelry, watches—receive cash by return mail. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Free information. Paramount Gold Refining Co., 1500-G Hennepin, Minneapolis, Minn.

Correspondence Courses

CORRESPONDENCE COURSES and educational books, slightly used. Sold. Rented. Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Complete details and bargain catalog Free. Send name. Nelson Company, 3518 Manhattan Building, Chicago.

Postcards Exchanged

POSTCARD COLLECTORS: 50 Views Boston. Two cards mailed weekly, each with friendly message $1.25. Postcard Exchange, Box 884, Boston, Mass.

Horns Mounted

MOUNTED STEER HORNS for sale. Over six feet spread. Free photo. Lee Bertillion, Mineola, Texas.

Jiu Jitsu

'6 KNOCKOUT BLOWS without use of fists by internationally famous Jiu Jitsu instructor. Send 25c. S. J. Jorgensen, 1355 Maritime Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

Help Wanted—Instructions

FOREST JOBS AVAILABLE $125-$175 MONTH. Cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Qualify immediately. Write Rayson Service C-59, Denver, Colo.

particular did Don Rodriguez de Valdez y Munoz look forward to the pleasure of Señor Haveril's presence.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VALDEZ FIESTA

A DAY of fiesta at the hacienda in Paradise Valley was a day trimmed all around the edges with pleasing extravagances. Indians squatted over the barbecue pits, turning long willow poles on which thick chunks of juicy young beef were cooking and filling the air with an invitation to come and eat. Under the trees by the creek were long tables with benches, and there were tortillas and huge bowls of chile con carne and frijoles, just hot enough to burn your tongue and yet not quite sear it for all time. There were ollas of red wine, as strong as a strong man's friendly handclasp, and cobs of corn and astonishing messes made of young string beans, squash, onions, tomatoes and calabasas.

But all this was a mere nothing. There were other things to come first and also to follow after.

There were young people there, boys and girls who loved to chase after the greased pig and to shin up the greased pole, pretty nearly always to fail, amidst shrieks of laughter. There were boys and girls, a bit older, old enough to fall in love.

And there were horse races. The open road in front of the house was the track. Any man who thought he had a fast horse was free to ride. There were a dozen riders, each willing to bet his shirt on his mount. Tom Storm, who seemed to feel important, was a sort of master of ceremonies. It was he who lined the contestants up, dictated the course which was up the road the length of a mile, then back. And Tom Storm fired the pistol shot to set them off.

Ross Haveril had picked the win-

ner with his eye before the horses trotted out into the road. He fancied a certain big golden-yellow sorrel stallion. But he did not know until the race was over and this horse had won by six or eight lengths, that it was Tom Storm's horse, Destruction. Haveril's eyes were alight with appreciation of a fine horse when he saw Destruction come bursting home.

"It's Storm's horse, Destruction," he heard someone say. "A great horse, but he's a man-killer."

So that was the horse that was supposed to have killed Willard Hale!

Ross went down to the creek, a place of green shadowiness, for a long cool drink. And he was surprised to find that Rose-alba Devlin had also come to the fiesta.

She looked at him strangely, and he felt certain that she had followed him. She opened her lips to speak, but said nothing. She just stood there and looked at him. To save his life he could not interpret that look.

"Mr. Haveril," she said, and seemed to speak with difficulty.

"The name is Ross," he said, smiling.

"Ross, then," she corrected herself. "I don't know why I am saying this to you. I don't like you. Maybe I hate you. But I guess you're a square-shooter."

He took off his hat and bowed to her.

Her fair face darkened. He was by way of having the light touch on life at a moment when there was no levity with her.

ROSE DEVLIN was dressed for outdoors. Since this was the first time she had ever set foot at the Valdez hacienda, and since she never intended to come here again, she had taken pains to frame her piquant loveliness in a costume which would be marked and remembered. In olive green riding outfit with a wide red belt, high black boots, which fitted like gloves, a broad hat adorned with a feather, and a red silk blouse that could have come only from Mexico, she had accomplished her purpose. But somehow Ross Haveril was concerned more with her eyes, her vagrant curls and the mold of her red mouth than with these outward embellishments.

He waited for her to go on. He had not thought that she would seek him out, that she could conceivably have any word for him.

She looked over her shoulder to make sure they were alone, and alone they were, save for the rushing water in the creek at their feet and the thick greenery overhead of willows and alders and slim young aspens.

"I don't know why you came back to our mountains," she said. As already a shadow had drifted over her face, so now did a deeper darkness come into her eyes. "Some crazy whim, I suppose. If you hadn't come back—"

"I know," he interrupted. "If I hadn't come back, Bob Roberts would be alive now."

"Never mind that! I came to tell you this: You have money, a lot of money, more money than most of us know anything about. All right, shove it into your pocket and . . . and go! Leave this country right away, just as fast as you can."

"Rose," Ross Haveril said softly. "Rosalie. Rose-alba, because I like Rose-alba best of all. Tell me. What's this all about?"

"I don't like you," cried the girl. "Maybe I hate you. But somehow—Oh, I don't know! But I do know

this: If you stay here they . . . they— Oh, some of them are going to kill you! Do you understand?"

"Understand? I don't know what you're talking about?"

It was just then, of all times, that he glimpsed Rita's small dark face, her liquid eyes, large and staring, as she stopped short in the little crooked path through the trees.

Rita acted queerly. She started to dart forward. Then she took in the picture which Ross Haveril and Rose Devlin made. Apparently she leaped to a lot of temperamental conclusions and caught up her fluffy white skirts and ran, her blue ribbons fluttering.

Ross Haveril, with the memory of her scurrying flight still in his eye, turned back to Rose-alba.

"Tell it to me in words a man can understand," he said. "What is this all about? They are going to kill me. That's nice. But who are *they?*"

"I can't tell you!"

"It's Bull Strake, isn't it? And Tom Storm? And, just for a wild guess, maybe, your daddy's kicking in? Black Jack wouldn't cry his eyes out, would he, if I fell over a cliff?"

He saw the lift and heave of her breasts, and he saw the dark passionate glimmer in her eyes. "Why, she's only a kid in her teens, a baby," he said to himself. "And she's trying to carry on like a grown-up!" And he was sorry he had treated her roughly.

"So, Rose-alba," he said gently. "I ought to thank you and I do, and I won't ask you any more questions. I begin to get into my thick skull that I'm not wanted around here. But I'll tell you just this: I'm staying, and if anything happens to me you'll know that you did all you could, warning me to high-tail somewhere else."

"Please!" Rose-alba pleaded. "Oh, please!" And he saw bright tears in her eyes.

HIS brows came together in a thick puzzled frown. "Here's something," he said. "You warn me, Rose-alba, and I think I know why. You don't want your father to be rated a killer on top of other things. But the funny thing is that I have already been warned—not to come here to Paradise Valley. It seems I'm to be killed here, too, and that means Valdez. Valdez and Storm and Bull Strake and Black Jack Devlin, all in one pile? It doesn't make sense, does it?"

Rose-alba Devlin's voice sounded like a shrug of indifference. "I've done what I could. Suit yourself," she said. She slipped by him and returned to the crowd churning about the tables.

A dance platform of rough boards rudely planed, then covered with scrapings of candles to provide slickness, centered the grove, and there were three musicians with violin, guitar and banjo, already warming up. Couples carrying sandwiches or cake or barbecued beef, were already jiggling their feet. They would dance all afternoon and all night.

Ross Haveril looked around and saw Rita. She avoided him, pretending she did not even see him. He stood leaning against a tree, looking the gathering over.

"Little Don Rooster has sure let the gates down today, setting his haughty pride to one side and letting the riff-raff in," he thought.

Luke came over, and as he did so, Ross saw Bull Strake step up to his cousin Grove Jordan.

"If I was you, kid," Luke said in a low voice, "I'd get out of this mess. I don't like the smell of it. It sticks out a mile that Strake and the Bed-

loes and Jake Go-down are especially imported for your sake."

"They won't start anything at a place like this, with a crowd around. It would be a fool thing to do when they could drop in on us at the ranch any night."

"Men are always doing fool things."

"What I can't make out is how Valdez figures in this."

"He's in with Storm, one way or another. I've got the hunch that Storm owns him."

Later they saw Valdez. He was most cordial, fairly aflutter with affability, but down underneath patently nervous. He looked as though he hadn't slept for nights, and his eyes were haunted by a shadow that might have been fear. Altogether a queer, strained atmosphere hung over the place.

STILL the young people danced and were gay and the tenseness of the hour was overlaid with laughter as the jars of strong red wine went around. Ross noticed that Rose Devlin did not dance, perhaps because, with Bob Roberts so newly dead, she hadn't the heart for it. He saw Tom Storm try to persuade her, only to have her turn her back on him and walk away.

He noted, too, that Rita, whose little feet one knew were made for dancing, did not go near the platform, though many men laid siege to her. Storm asked her, too. She did not treat him as coldly as Rose had done, but shrank away, eluding him just as effectually. There was a scowl of rage on Storm's handsome face.

Grove Jordan rejoined Ross and Luke. "You saw me with Bull Strake," he said to Ross in that sour and sullen voice of his. "Bull's a cousin of mine but I hate his guts. He was trying to pump me. There are a lot of things he'd like to know about you. And he'd like to know,

Curved, "shock-proof" **GOLD PLATE FRONT** watch with all the color and charm of natural yellow gold. Stainless back. Accurate. GUARANTEE by a famous $1,000,000 FACTORY enclosed. Watch is yours **FREE** of extra charge with every ring ordered **NOW** and paid for promptly on our easy two monthly $2 payment plan. (Total only $4.) Remember . . . the cost of the watch is included in the price of the ring . . . **You Pay Nothing Extra** for the watch! **No Charge for Credit . . . We trust you!** No red tape. We'll ship at once. TEN DAY FREE TRIAL. **Mail Postcard or Coupon NOW. Send No Money** with order! Your package comes (postage paid to your door) by RETURN MAIL.

GLADIATOR RING DOUBLE HEAD SET IN LIFETIME STERLING SILVER DECORATED in rich 1/30, 14 K GOLD

GOLD STANDARD WATCH CO., Dept. X-522, Newton, Mass.

Rush offer. ☐ Lady's Model ☐ Man's Model

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

OLD BOOKS WANTED

We pay big cash prices for thousands of different titles. We bought over 7,500 books in past twenty-one months, paying as high as $500 for a single book. For example, we will pay you cash for the following books as described in our price list:

Pilgrim's Progress	**$4,000.00**
Adventures of Tom Sawyer	**200.00**
Old Swimmin' Hole	**75.00**
Black Beauty	**100.00**
Treasure Island	**50.00**
Scarlet Letter	**35.00**
Venus and Adonis	**5,000.00**
Leaves of Grass	**250.00**
Snow-Bound	**45.00**
Uncle Tom's Cabin	**100.00**
Ben Hur	**50.00**
Last of the Mohicans	**50.00**
Moby Dick	**100.00**
Little Women	**25.00**
McGuffey Primer	**100.00**
Tamerlane & Other Poems	**5,000.00**

These are but a few of the many thousands of books we want. DON'T SEND BOOKS until you have checked our latest list giving full information. Don't delay—a single old school book, story book, bible, poetry, history, travel, almanacs, newspapers, letters, etc., may bring you $25, $50, $100, $500 or even $5,000 cash for certain books. Better investigate NOW. Send 10c to the **American Book Mart, 140 S. Dearborn St., Dept. 477, Chicago,** and we will send you latest list of old books we want to buy and cash prices we will pay.

TRAIN FOR ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS

BY ACTUAL WORK ON MOTORS, GENERATORS, ENGINES Etc.

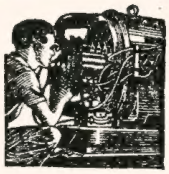
PAY TUITION AFTER GRADUATION

I'll Finance Your Training

and include at NO EXTRA COST a 4 Weeks course in RADIO

Mail coupon today for details of my **"Pay after graduation plan"** and famous Coyne **"Learn by Doing"** method of practical shop training for your start for success in this big-pay field as well as full particulars on the **4 weeks Radio Course I am including to all who enroll now.** Age or lack of money need not hold you back... Get training **first;** then take **12 months** to complete small monthly tuition payments starting **5 months** after you begin training.

LEARN BY DOING IN 12 WEEKS IN COYNE SHOPS



Coyne Training is practical training, easy to grasp... you learn quickly by doing **actual jobs** on **real electrical machinery** in **my shops.** Not by books—**not** a correspondence or a home study course—you are trained right here in my big Chicago training shops. You don't need previous experience or a lot of book learning. Expert instructors guide you every step of the way. Start any time.

EARN WHILE LEARNING

Job Help After Graduation

Big things ahead in Electricity mean steady jobs, good pay, and a real future for many trained men in this fascinating "live" industry. **Thousands of opportunities.** Rush the coupon TODAY for **Big Free Book** with many photos of the great Coyne Shops in Chicago — Opportunities in Electricity—How we can train you for your start in this field and let you **pay your tuition after graduation in easy monthly payments.** If you need part time work to help with living expenses my employment department will help you. **After graduation you will be given Free lifetime employment service.**

DIESEL, ELECTRIC REFRIGERATION AND AIR CONDITIONING TRAINING

Now included at no extra cost. Take advantage of this training to increase your earning capacity.

GET MY STORY

I have a mighty interesting story to tell about my school that will interest any fellow who wants to get ahead . . . **Fill in the coupon today** and mail it to me and you'll get my big FREE Catalog and all the facts. *H. C. Lewis*

H. C. LEWIS, President, Coyne Electrical School, 500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 29-45, Chicago, Ill.

Send me, without cost or obligation, your Big Free Book and details of **Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation-Offer** and **4 weeks Radio Course.**

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

if it came to ruckus between him and you, what side of the fence I'd be on."

"I'd sort of like to know, too," admitted Ross.

"Your side," grunted Jordan.

"Thanks, Grove," said Ross.

As it grew dusky along the creek and under the oaks the Indians built up big bonfires and lighted the string of colored lanterns over the dance floor. Rose-alba shook hands with Valdez, ignored Rita, and left. Storm hurried after her and was obviously asking to see her home. She swung up into the saddle without answering him and rode away.

As quick as a flash, Rita, making sure that both Valdez and Storm were occupied, came to Ross Haveril. She hardly stopped an instant, just slipping a folded sheet of notepaper into his hand, before she hurried on.

There was light enough to read the few words. Then Ross shoved the paper into his pocket.

"In half an hour I'm to cross the footbridge over the creek, not letting anyone see me," he said to Luke. "She'll go to the house, slip out the back and meet me in the orchard."

Luke meditated, then spoke with a growl almost as deep as Jordan's.

"It's a damn fool thing to do. So I guess you'll be sure to do it."

"I think the kid's on the level," said Ross, "and I know she's scared to death. And there are a lot of things she can tell me. Maybe she's going to, now."

He stood talking to both of them until it was time to meet Rita. When he strode off in the direction of the footbridge Luke and Grove looked at each other, then silently followed him, being careful to keep out of sight.

What does Rita want to tell Ross? Will the Valdez fiesta end in bloodshed? What is back of Rose Devlin's warning? Don't miss the fourth thrilling installment of ACES COME HIGH in next week's issue!

THIS BIG MONEY-MAKING OUTFIT...

Get Started At Once In a Fine Paying COFFEE AGENCY

How would you like to have a fine paying business of your own—a simple-to-run Coffee Agency with immediate earnings up to $40.00, $50.00 or $60.00 in a week? Here's your big chance if *you act now. For only $1.00,* I'll furnish your complete business equipment (actually valued at $7.20) containing absolutely everything you need to begin making big money at once.

But don't send me any money now—I just want your name. If you are an active and reliable man or woman—and want to better yourself—want cash to spend, money to save, the means to live in comfort—let me show you your big chance. A dignified Coffee Agency of your own, an all-year-round business, easily managed, requiring no experience, no special skill. Whether you operate part time or full doesn't matter. *And you don't risk a cent.*

I'm not asking for money. I want you first to send for all the free facts—then decide. I want you to see how you can make money fast—all on a good-faith deposit of only $1.00.

Be a Food Distributor

I'll send you a Complete Display Outfit (actually valued at $7.20) to help you establish a money making NEIGHBORHOOD COFFEE AGENCY, without money risk on your part. And I am willing to extend credit, so you can build a big paying business on my capital. My Food Distributors make good money because they handle daily necessities people simply must have. The products are nationally known for high quality and value, and *absolutely guaranteed.* You make calls on your list of regular customers, take orders, make deliveries and pocket your profits on the spot.

$129.00 in One Week

Scores of men and women write me about their wonderful cash earnings. Sworn statements show clear cash profits of $47.50 to $146.00 made in a single week. Norman Geisler, of Michigan, reported $129.00 in a week; W. J. Way, of Kansas, with us nine years, reported $19.10 in one day; Gunson R. Wood, New York, $82.10 in one week; Mrs. Ella Ehrlicher, Missouri, $85.00 in a week. Ruby Hannen, West Virginia, $73 in a week. I don't say that everyone makes that much. Some are satisfied with less. But it shows your big possibilities! Get the free facts. See for yourself.

I Send Everything

Any earnest man or woman can make a success as a Food Distributor. In addition to the Complete Display Outfit, with a big assortment of full-sized packages, I also send a simple, sure-fire Plan which anyone can follow. I also send you advertising material, samples to give away, and everything else you need to make good profits your very first day. I guide you and help you all along. You, of course, can get groceries and other household necessities for your own use at wholesale prices—*so you save as well as earn.*

30-Day Trial
No Money Risk

This is a sincere offer made by an old-established, million dollar company operating from Coast to Coast, and noted for square dealing. Begin earning at once. Unless you make a trial you'll never know what fine profits may be waiting for you as owner of your own Coffee Agency. Strike out for yourself—be independent—free of money worries. You don't risk a penny and you have everything to gain by getting the free facts AT ONCE! Mail the coupon or a postcard NOW!

E. J. MILLS, President
9310 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

SEND NO MONEY
Just Rush Coupon Today!

MR. E. J. MILLS, President
9310 Monmouth Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio

Without obligation to me, please send me at once full free facts about how you'll help me establish a money-making Coffee Agency through which I can make up to $60.00 in a week.

Name .....

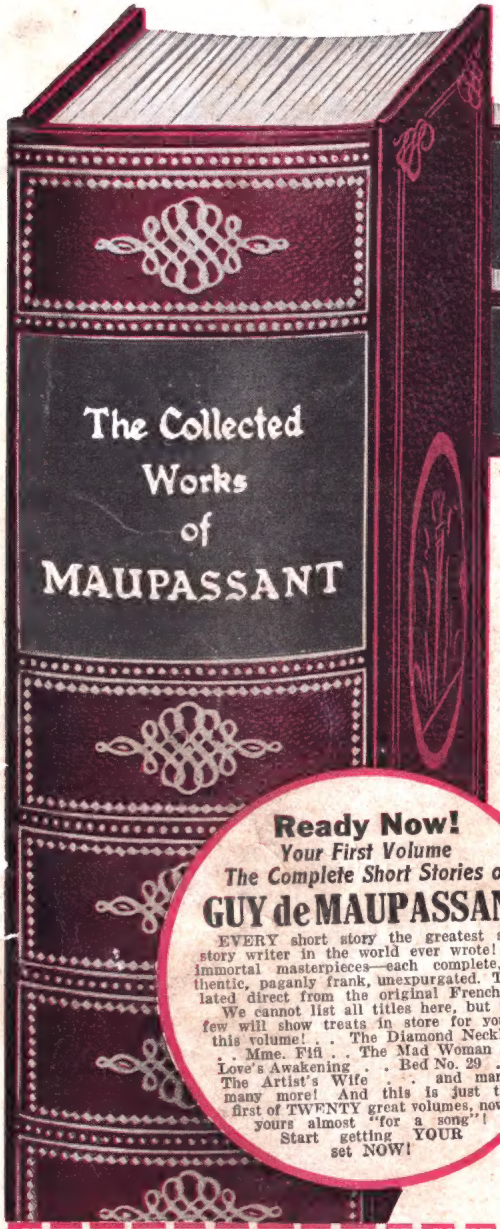
Address .....

.....

(Please print or write plainly)

Amazing Gift Offer to WESTERN STORY READERS

The Works of Twenty Great Authors in Twenty Giant Volumes



YOURS-practically for The Asking!

We Pay The Postage On These Beautiful Big Lifetime Books

THE MOST AMAZING offer ever made to readers of a magazine! Here in giant, beautiful volumes is a complete library containing all the important works of the greatest authors who ever lived—the most celebrated in all the world. All smash hits of stage, radio, movies! ALL such fascinating, exciting, thrilling reading that once you start them you can't put them down! Just look at these partial contents—only a FRACTION of what these books hold—each book a library in itself.

Richly beautiful books; your choice of either the Regular Edition, in morocco-grained cloth—or the DE LUXE Edition, gorgeously bound in Royal Florentine bindings—super calf-grain material, luxuriously embossed in colors of red and gold! And all twenty volumes are YOURS—yours to own, to read, to display proudly in your home—for little more than the asking!

9,500,000 words!
15,677 pages
SIZE OF EACH VOLUME
Height 8 ¼ inches
Width 5 ¾ inches
Thickness 2 ½ inches

1. MAUPASSANT. (See panel at left.)
2. HUGO. 39 Complete works, including Hunchback of Notre Dame, Ninety-Three, Women of the Streets, The Souls, etc.
3. STEVENSON. 144 adventurous novels, stories, poems, Treasure Island, Jekyll and Hyde, Kidnaped, Suicide Club, Child's Garden of Verses, etc.
4. TOLSTOI. 31 breathless novels, stories. Anna Karenina, Kreutzer Sonata, The Cossacks, Love, many more.
5. POE. ALL 128 tales, poems, essays. Annabel Lee, the Raven, The Gold Bug, Murders in the Rue Morgue, etc.—every one complete!
6. IBSEN. All his daring plays, absolutely complete; Doll's House, Ghosts, Hedda Gabler, Peer Gynt, 7 others.
7. BALZAC. 25 complete frank novelettes: Girl With Golden Eyes, Imaginary Mistress, Passion in the Desert, Vendetta, many other famous titles.
8. KIPLING. Complete novel, Light That Failed. 76 exciting stories—75 great ballads, verses, including Gunga Din, Danny Deever, Vampire.
9. DUMAS. 175 romantic adventures—The Wedding Night, Grecian Slave Girl, Glory of Love, Death of the King's Mistress, many others.
10. CONAN DOYLE. All the best Sherlock Holmes—Study in Scarlet, Sign of Four, Red Headed League, many more—plus Doyle's other greatest works.

One volume editions of other great authors now in preparation—11. Emerson 12. Flaubert 13. Oscar Wilde 14. Voltaire 15. Haggard 16. Chekhov 17. Dickens 18. Hawthorne 19. Cellini 20. Rousseau

Ready Now!
Your First Volume
The Complete Short Stories of
GUY de MAUPASSANT

EVERY short story the greatest short story writer in the world ever wrote! 222 immortal masterpieces—each complete, authentic, paganly frank, unexpurgated. Translated direct from the original French.

We cannot list all titles here, but these few will show treats in store for you in this volume! . . . The Diamond Necklace . . Mme. Fifi . . The Mad Woman . . Love's Awakening . . Bed No. 29 . . The Artist's Wife . . . and many, many more! And this is just the first of TWENTY great volumes, now yours almost "for a song"! Start getting YOUR set NOW!

HOW TO GET YOUR BOOKS

The first book, the Works of Guy de Maupassant, is ready NOW!

Fill in, mail reservation form below. On receipt of reservation together with special GIFT COUPON below plus purely nominal sum of 89c for the Regular Edition (or $1.39 for De Luxe) a copy of first book, Works of Maupassant, will be sent you. At same time you will be placed on preferred list for forthcoming books as they come off the presses.

Full simple instructions on how to receive other volumes will be sent with first book. To get your books in quickest possible way, send coupon and remittance to our New York distributing depot at the address below. THERE IS POSITIVELY NO CHARGE FOR PACKING OR POSTAGE. Mail This Coupon With Reservation Certificate Now!

READERS' RESERVATION CERTIFICATE
Special Gift Offer to Western Story Readers
BOOK COUPON EXCHANGE, (Distributing Depot)
330 West 42nd St., New York, N. Y.

Please reserve in my name the books listed in your generous offer to Western Story Readers. I prefer the edition checked below:

☐ Regular Cloth Edition (89c each)
☐ De Luxe Embossed Edition ($1.39 each)

NO EXTRA CHARGE FOR POSTAGE ON EITHER EDITION

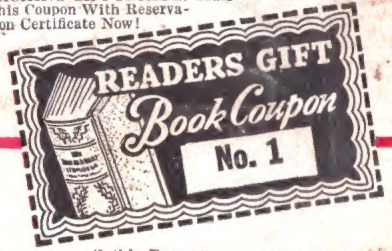
I enclose remittance for my first book which, with the attached GIFT COUPON, entitles me at once to The Works of Maupassant.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... *State* ..... S.S. 2-39

A convenient mail order form for future books will be forwarded with your copy of Maupassant



Be sure to mail this Reservation Form IMMEDIATELY. Don't "put off"—and lose out on this great opportunity.

ACT NOW!